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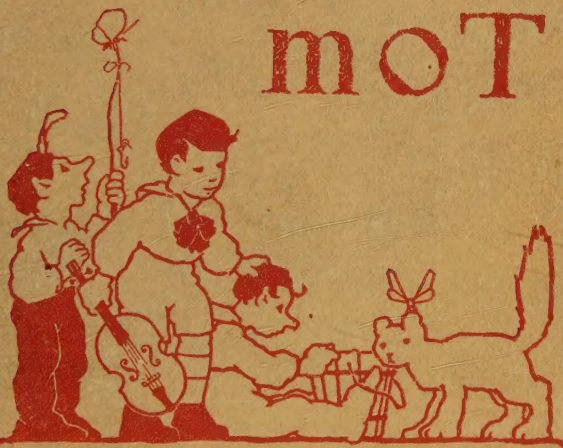

By MAX TRELL

Illustrated by Jo mc mahon

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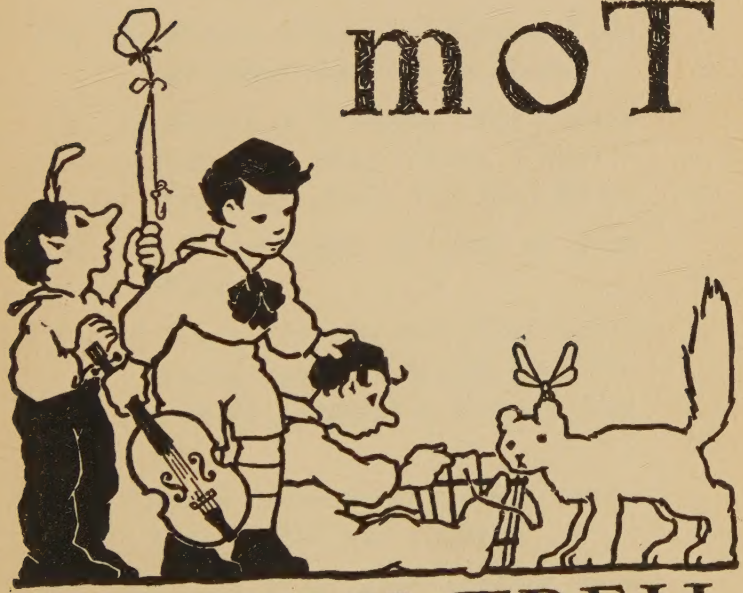

By MAX TRELL

Illustrated by Jo mc mahon

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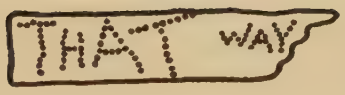
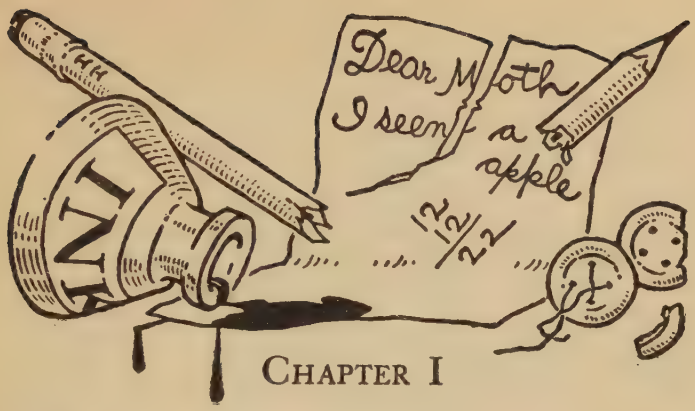




Chapter I

In Which You Learn More About Tom Than Is Good for Him

TOM LYNN was the most contrary lad that ever lived.

He did nothing right that could be done wrong.

He never listened when he was spoken to.

He slept late.

He ate much.

He turned down page-corners.

He made faces.

He wore down his heels on one side.

He lost buttons.

In short, he was a *particularly* bad boy.

Chapter II

A Chapter in Which a Fiddle Plays the Largest Part

OF all Tom's possessions, the one he cared least about was his fiddle. He would have traded it for a toothpick, or a pin, or a speck of dust.

His aunt, on the contrary, was rapturously fond of the fiddle.

"Tom," she coaxed, on the day when this story begins, "please play me a tune."

Tom, who was gravely cutting his initials in the leg of the table, didn't look up. "I *did* play you a tune," said he.

"That was two weeks ago. It's time to play another." She hurried into the parlor, returning a moment later with the wooden fiddlecase.

"I'd rather whistle it," he protested as a last resort. Ignoring this remark she opened

the case, fetched out the fiddle and its fiddle-stick, and thrust them into his unwilling hands. Then she settled herself placidly in the rocking-chair, pushed her spectacles back on her forehead, crossed her hands over her lap, and smiled. He frowned.

"I don't know what to play."

"Play," she murmured blissfully, "play anything."

"I'll play scales," said Tom. Thereupon he played scales.

Tom played louder and louder, faster and faster. A pained expression stole over his aunt's face. "It sounds like the cat," she remarked.

As chance would have it, at this very instant who should pass under the window but the cat herself.

"It *is* the cat!" he exclaimed. With that he flung the fiddle at the cat's head.

You may think this exceedingly strange. What happened immediately afterwards is stranger still.

Instead of catching the fiddle on her head, Pussy deftly caught it in her forepaws. Why she should have done this I cannot imagine. It was most unlike a cat. Then away she sped with it, across the garden, through the half-opened gate and down the road.

"She's running off with the fiddle," Tom announced cheerfully.

"In that case," remarked his aunt, "you'd better go out and tie up the cow before she jumps over the moon."

Just then Simple Simon and Jack Sprout came up the road. Simon was carrying a fishing-rod and Jack a wooden pail. They were going fishing. When Pussy saw them she

dropped the fiddle like a hot cake, and swerved off into the meadow.

"Don't forget the fiddle . . . don't forget the fiddle!" Tom shouted. As it was quite plain she *had* forgotten it, he dashed out to remind her of it. Reaching it, he snatched it up and raced after her.

Pussy doubled back toward the house. Tom kept drawing closer and closer. He held the fiddle by the neck. The wind whistled through the strings.

"Don't run too fast, you'll lose your breaths both of you," warned his aunt, as they darted past the window. Neither he nor the cat paid the slightest heed. The cat, in fact, turned off sharply, pointing her nose in the direction of the well. It would have been a thousandfold wiser if she had pointed it into her curled-up paws and gone to sleep.

Why?

You will learn as promptly as she did, and, I hope, with less trouble.

Chapter III

In Which There Are Several Falls and Other Amusing Incidents

PAYING no attention to Tom and Pussy, Simon took the pail from Jack, set it down in the middle of the road and began to fish.

"Humph," remarked Simple Simon, "the whale isn't biting today. It must be out." He took a bell out of his pocket and rang it over the pail. "Hi there . . . are you there?" he called. There was no response. He withdrew

the line and peered at the little worm wriggling on the hook. "Where's the whale?" he asked.

"Don't you think," ventured Jack hesitantly, "you ought to put some water in the pail?"

The pail, you should know, belonged to Simon's mother. It was old, broken-down, full of cracks, a very mischief of a useless pail.

"I never put water in the pail before," retorted Simon.

"But you never caught a whale before."

Simon's face brightened. "Where can I get water?"

"At the well."

So to the well they went, Simon carrying the pail and rod. When they reached it they found Tom and the cat whirling round and round. Tom held the fiddle out at arm's length before him, shouting for the cat to take it. Turning the pail bottom-side up Simon sat down upon it.

"It's no use interrupting," he said to Jack. "We'll wait until they're through."

At this instant a curious thing happened, which shows how foolhardy it is to force fiddles on cats while chasing them around wells. Pussy jumped upon the stone wall of

the well. Tom flung the fiddle at her with all his force. "Take it," he said.

Instead of taking it, she fell into the well.

The fiddle had a wooden head. It neglected to slip its neck out of Tom's hand. In consequence he was drawn over the wall and went tumbling down the well after the cat, while the foolish fiddle bumped into Simon's nose.

Just then his aunt bustled up to the well. "Tom, come back here at once!" she called sternly, addressing the bottom of his shoes as they slipped down the deep, dark shaft.

Chapter IV

In Which It Is Shown That a Good Reflection May Prove Useful—With Some Lines You May Know

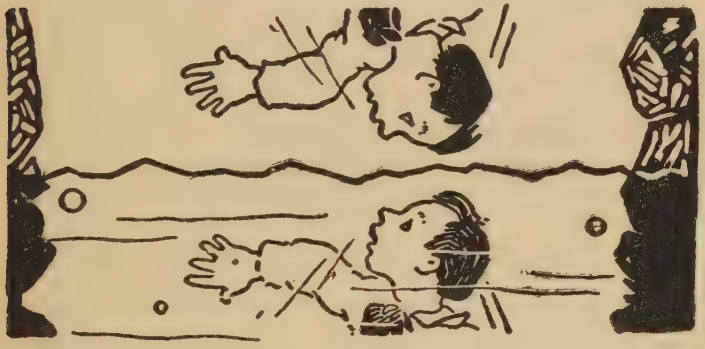
AS Tom fell, another Tom arose. It was his reflection. Reflections are extraordinary beings. Go where you will, you have only to gaze into water to find them.

Yet how contrary they are! You gaze down, they gaze up. You live on land, they live in water. You are good, they are bad.

Now, Tommy Lynn's was a most *particularly* good reflection, the exact opposite of himself.

No sooner did it spy him come tumbling down the well than it started up to meet him. "Turn back, turn back!" it urged. The warning came too late. He was in no position to turn back, or, for that matter, to turn anything but topsy-turvy. Down, down he came.

"My, my," said Master Reflection, viewing the approaching splash with dismay, "I shall have to do something . . . do something . . ." It was earnest about it. It did want to help its master. Alas, in the twinkling of an eye, its master dived into it.



Poor, poor reflection! Through and through it goes Tom, as neatly as water through a pipe. Then, caught in the splash, up the shaft of the well it springs. In an instant it lands as lightly as a shadow on the upper wall.

Meanwhile Tom comes to rest a few feet below the surface of the cool, dark water.

Does he drown? No, indeed. He does not even feel moist. He drinks in the water as a few moments before he breathed in the air. He sees and he hears. But he cannot move. He can only gaze up the long shaft, ending in a circular patch of blue sky . . . high, high up.

Master Tom has become his own reflection.

But Tom was not pleased at all. Hardly was he in the well when he desired to leave it.

"Pull me out, pull me out!" he commanded his reflection, who was still standing on the upper wall. At that instant Tom's aunt, mistaking the reflection for Tom (for wasn't it the image of him?), joyfully gathered him up in her arms.

"Thank goodness, Tom, you're safe. And not even wet!"

"I'm not Tom!" retorted Master Reflection, trying its utmost to squirm free. "I'm Mot, I'm Mot!"

"You're who?" she asked in bewilderment.

"Mot!"

All at once she broke into a smile. "Why, that's Tom backwards! How silly, Tom. Did you think you could fool your old aunt . . . your old aunt who knows you backwards and forwards?" And with that she carried the unlucky Mot into the house.

And now an altogether alarming thing started to happen to Tom. The farther his aunt carried the reflection, the deeper he sank. It was vain to try to grasp the stones that projected from the sides. They slipped through his fingers as soon as he touched them. His fingers were no longer real, only the reflection of fingers. Looking up he made out Jack and Simon and the fishing-line.

"Simon, Simon!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Throw down your line for me!" As reflections are seen but not heard, Simon remained motionless. Jack, on the contrary,

felt as if a thought had just entered his head. It was a thought about Pussy.

"You ought . . . you ought to throw down your line—" he began.

Simon stared at him. "You mean *this* line?"

Jack nodded.

"But this line is for the whale!"

"Haven't you . . . any other line?"

Simon grinned. Then, winking slyly, he whispered in Jack's ear: "I have a great many other lines of different lengths, odd lines, with matched ends." Noting that his companion did not understand, he took out his little bell again and, while ringing it, fetched out the following lines:

Ding-dong bell
Pussy's in the well.
Who threw her in?
Little Tommy Lynn.
What a naughty boy was that
To drown a pretty Pussy cat
That did no harm
But catch the mice in his father's barn.

Chapter V

In Which Little Is Said in Few Words

AS chance would have it, none of the lines reached Tom, for they were, like this chapter, much too short.

Chapter VI

A Bug's Proposal and How Tom's Acting Upon It Showed How Extremely Truthful a Proverb Can Be

DOWN into the well went Tom. The water swirled up past him like a thick wind. Glancing down he dimly made out the cat. In the uncertain light she seemed to be taking on the shape of a fish. Then she slid out of sight.

All at once he landed on the back of a bug and rolled over and over until he came sharply to rest against the stone side. Rising to his feet he found himself on a broad shelf which extended almost half-way around the well. The well itself appeared all at once to have become tremendously big. So distant was the opposite side that it was quite lost in the shadows.

Please do not imagine that it had changed

in a single particle. The change had taken place in our Master Tom, who was now no larger than a clothes-pin, or a half-used pencil, or a thumb. As he sank, he shrank. Fortunately he stopped shrinking as he stopped sinking, else both Tom and this book would have come to an abrupt end.

The bug peered at him, cocking its eye.

"Hm-m," it said.

"Hm-m yourself," said Tom, "and see how you like it. How can I get out of the well?"

"Reflections can't leave the well."

"I'm a boy. I can do anything I please."

"Hm-m," the bug admitted thoughtfully, "you talk just like a boy, but you look just like a reflection. Ah, now I remember who you are. You're Mot, that *particularly* good reflection. So it was you who rushed by here a few minutes ago on the way to the surface? What happened?"

"I want to get out of the well," Tom said impatiently. "I want to get out of the well!"

At this the bug became very grave. "Hm-m, let me see now. There should be a way. You say you're a *particularly* good reflection?"

"I didn't say so at all!"

"—a *particularly* good reflection," it continued tranquilly, "and you want to leave the well?" All at once it gave a bright little squeak. "I have it! You can leave the well. But it all depends on whether you want to leave it badly, or not."

"I want to leave it badly, of course!"

"In that case you have only to do a *particularly* bad deed."

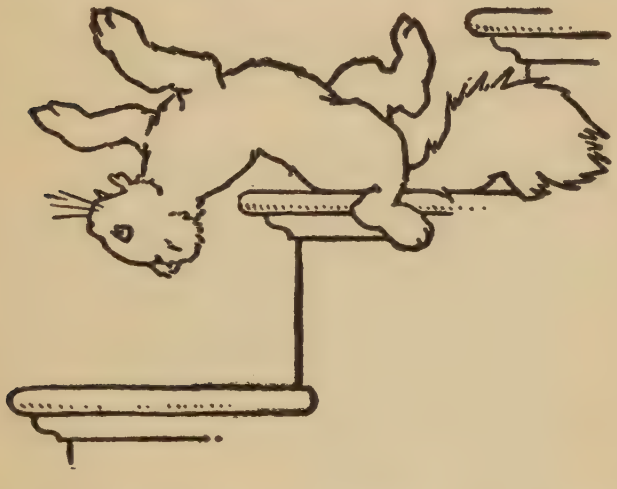
Tom could scarcely believe his ears. "You mean as soon as I do a bad deed I can leave the well?"

"A *particularly* bad deed," it corrected. "You're a *particularly* good reflection, you know. You must act just contrary to yourself. When you act contrary you become a boy. And boys don't belong in a well."

It paused. "It isn't as easy as it sounds, though. You aren't used to being bad."

"I'll try my best," Tom said.

"Hm-m, it would be much better if you tried your worst. If I were you I'd start by doing a few plain little bad deeds like shout-



ing for dinner, tearing pages out of books, kicking the cat down a flight of stairs—"

"I'd like to kick the cat," said Tom warmly.

"—frightening old ladies, stuffing nails in the sofa, whistling the same tune all day long, mixing salt in the sugar, and the like. Just for practice," it explained. "But much

the best of all is, coming late to school without the slightest excuse."

"O-oh, I couldn't do that!"

"It *is* difficult," the bug agreed. "Still, you might try."

"I mean that there's no school here."

"Indeed there is. And you're late for it already!"

Tom chuckled. "Where is it?"

"It's at the bottom of the bottom." Observing the puzzled expression on Tom's face, it added: "I'll take you there myself." It led him to a narrow ledge winding steeply down the side of the well. "Down this way," it said, feeling its way cautiously, for the light was dim.

"Hurry," Tom urged.

It halted abruptly. "The first rule about coming late to school is not to hurry. If you hurry you're bound to come on time."

"But if we don't hurry it will be too late to go at all."

"Hm-m, it's never too late to go to school."

Then it started down, making the same peculiar humming noise.

"I wonder what kind of a bug it is?" Tom said to himself. "What kind of a bug are you?" he asked aloud.

The bug apparently didn't hear his question, for it said: "Have you any books?"

"No."

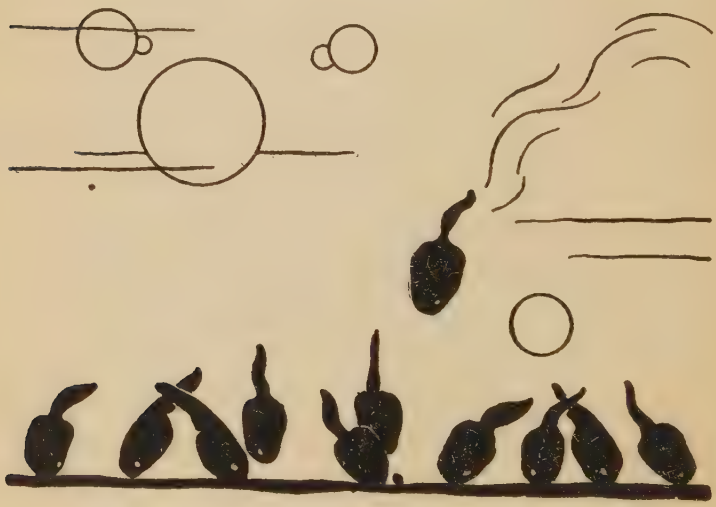
"Very good. You can say you lost them. That will make an admirable beginning. Then you can borrow some. Only you must be sure not to return them. The very worst scholars never return books."

They continued down the ledge in silence for a while, Tom turning over in his mind all the mischief he could do in the classroom. Then he glanced up once more. He could still make out the figures of Simon and Jack Sprout in the tiny circle of light, as in a telescope held backwards.

"I'll be out in a few minutes!" he called up to them. "It *will* be just a few minutes, won't it?" he asked the bug.

"Hm-m, just so!"

He was beginning to wonder whether he was shrinking again, for the bug seemed to be growing larger and larger, when they finally reached the bottom of the well and walked out upon level ground. By now his eyes had accustomed themselves to the darkness, and he was able to distinguish his surroundings. Against the circular wall, at a point where the bottom sloped down to form



a hollow, was a crack in the rock. Above it was a sign which read:

THE WELL-WELL SCHOOL

"We're here," the bug said. Tom stuck his head in through the crack to see what manner of school it was. He looked into a low, broad cave. A shaft of light slanted in from somewhere above. Squatting on a flat pebble near the farthermost wall was a green frog. He recognized it as the creature of loud voice, given to singing at night under his aunt's window. It was known as the Frog-Who-Lived-in-the-Well or sometimes as Master Frog-Well. In front and on either side of it were a score of tadpoles, all lying

flat on their chins. These were the little Wells. When one of them came up, on occasion, in the bucket, it was sent back again with the following:

Little Well,
Go back to your well,
You've nothing to buy
And I've nothing to sell.

As a rule this kept it from ever coming up again unless it did have something to buy, which was unusual.

Neither Master Frog-Well nor the little Wells made the least sound. They were, it appears, wrapped in thought, although they seemed fast asleep.

"I'm going in," Tom told the bug.

"Good luck—or, I should say, bad luck. I hope you fall into a mess of trouble. Come and see me again before you leave."

"Where will you be?"

"Hm-m, you'll find me around." It trotted off.

"That's the last I'll see of *him*," Tom thought, as he sidled in through the crack. On spying him the frog uttered a brisk welcoming croak. The little Wells, however, rose up in alarm and went dashing madly about, knocking their heads against the wall and squeaking like penny trumpets. After they had all sufficiently battered their heads, they settled down upon their chins again, regarding him dully through their black, pin-point eyes.

"Good morning," greeted the frog. "What brings you here?"

"My feet."

"You're late. Have you any excuse?"

Tom shook his head. "Not a one!"

Instead of scowling the frog gulped feelingly. "What a pity. Not a single one. You poor thing. We'll have to get you one—"

"I don't want any!"

"Tut-tut, don't fret. We have more than we need." It turned to the little Wells. "Children, give me a few of your best excuses."

They looked up blankly, then answered one by one.

The clock stopped.
I overslept.
I had to run an errand for my mother.
I thought it was early.
I had a sore foot.
I walked the wrong way.
Breakfast wasn't ready.
I forgot to wake up.
I meant to come on time.
I had to wait for my little sister.

There were many more, all on the same order. At length the frog lifted its leg as a sign for them to stop. It seemed ashamed. "The excuses are all . . . so bad," it apologized. "It's hard to find a good one nowadays."

"I won't take a bad excuse."

"Right! I wouldn't expect you to. A bad excuse is worse than none."

It was Tom's turn to be discomfited. "Any-

way," he put in sharply, "I've lost my books."

The frog uttered a joyous croak as it hopped high off its pebble. "You have! Then you are indeed the cleverest of scholars, for what earthly good are books? How troublesome they are to read! No sooner is one page finished than there is another. It is page after page to the very end of the book. If only the words were alike on each page. Then there would be no need for turning, turning, turning until your thumbs ache. And how many times do you meet with strange words? 'What do you mean?' you demand of them. Do they tell? Not at all. You may shout until you are hoarse without receiving so much as a nod from them. Then you must not throw books, or bend books, or use books to sit on. You must keep from turning down corners, and making dog's ears, and tearing out pages, and scribbling in the margin. In a word, books are a vexation and I am thankful you did not bring them into *my* school."

Before Tom could express his agreement, for you will not be surprised to learn that he shared this opinion of books, the frog hopped back to its pebble. "Do you know arithmetic?" it asked.

"No."

"Spelling?"
"No."
"Geography?"
"No."
"History?"
"No."
"Grammar?"
"No."
"Do you know anything?"

"No."

"Well," it said gravely, "I'll have to punish you."

"I'm glad of that!"

"The punishment for knowing nothing is no home-work. I know I'm being severe, but you must be punished. You'll not receive a single bit of home-work from me until you know something. Let this be a lesson to you!"

Leaving Tom to mourn over this punishment, it turned to the little Wells. "Is anyone absent today?"

There was no answer.

"Ah, everyone is absent today."

"That's wrong!" Tom said. "Everyone is here today. Can't you see them?"

"I can see them well enough. But that may be just imagination. No one answered when I called."

"You didn't call their names. They didn't know you were calling them."

"Dear me, that's so. I didn't think of that.

I'll call the roll." Then it hopped under a ledge in the far corner of the cave and emerged the next instant pushing in a bundle of leaves—under-water leaves—all fastened together to form a book. Yes, it was certainly a book!

"It's the roll!" it announced, spreading it out on the flat pebble. "Roll-call positions, my little Wells." At this they rose off their chins and formed a long straight line. The curious thing was that they all stood on their heads—all except one, a fat, glum-looking tadpole with dull, beady eyes. This creature stood on its tail, or more properly its stump, for its tail was short and stubby, like a whisk-broom. Tom, with impertinent curiosity, peered over the frog's shoulder at the names.

"Why," he exclaimed, "they're all Wells!"

"Of course, what did you suppose?" said the frog, beginning to call them off. The names ran as follows:

WELL KNOWN
WELL FED

WELL BEHAVED
WELL COME
WELL DONE
WELL SPENT
WELL NOW
WELL BEING
WELL AND-GOOD
WELL YES
WELL BRED
WELL WHAT
WELL MADE
WELL OFF
WELL TO-DO
WELL NIGH
WELL MEANT
WELL SAID

"And what about that one?" Tom asked, pointing to the glum-looking tadpole, who hadn't answered to any name.

The frog sighed. "That's Enough."

"Enough?"

"Well Enough, it should be. But it won't answer to that. It only answers to Enough Well." The frog sighed again. "Enough

Well—how can I call it that? There's no sense to it. It should be turned the other way around."

"And so should *it,*" Tom said, gazing at the tadpole. It continued standing motionless on the tip of its tail, its beady eyes fixed on its companions, who still stood on their heads. He couldn't help feeling that it would hate to be turned the other way around. He approached it.

"Oh, please, you'd better let Well Enough alone," the frog warned gravely.

Instead of heeding this advice, which, you may be sure, he had heard many times before, he grasped Well Enough firmly about the middle and with a deft twist set it thumping on its nose.

"There!" he cried triumphantly, holding it in this unhappy position. "Now it's done!"

The words had scarcely left his mouth when Well Enough with a violent squirm, freed itself with such unexpected suddenness, that it spurted headlong into its com-

rades, bowling them over as if they had been a row of empty bottles. In an instant the

cave was filled with black, wildly-darting bodies. Piercing squeaks of terror added to the tumult, above which the hoarse croaking of the frog sounded like a trumpet of dreadful warning.

"Let Well Enough alone! Let Well Enough alone!" it croaked.

Tom regarded the disorder with gaily beating heart. He expected at any moment

to find himself rising like a balloon straight up the shaft of the well. As he was waiting, Well Enough swirled about and came darting toward him. Its eyes gleamed angrily. He put aside thoughts of balloons for the moment and sprang to safety behind a pebble. The tadpole, which was almost as big as he, and exceedingly fat, sought him out. He scurried behind another pebble, casting a glance at the opening at the opposite side of the cave. Hither and thither, he dodged, trying to shake it off.

"That's it—let Well Enough alone—very good, ver-r-ry good!" the frog croaked cheerfully. It certainly didn't realize how earnestly he was trying to take its advice. All at once, as he darted out from behind a pebble, it caught him. Topsy-turvy he went. Round and round spun the cave.

"Good—*particularly* good—reflection—" he heard the frog say. Then the ground seemed to give way before him and he felt himself falling, falling. It was dark as night.

He was falling out of the well!

He was quite sure of it!

Quite suddenly he sailed out into a place where the sunshine was so strong that he could hardly open his eyes.

Chapter VII

Curious Adventures with Cucumbers, an Eel and a Cat

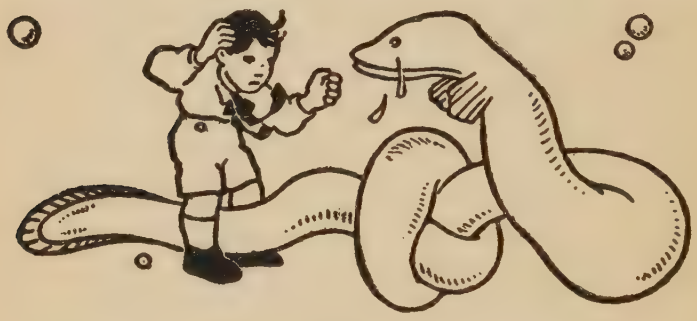
WHEN, after a few moments, his eyes became used to the light, Tom saw that while he had quite certainly fallen out of the well, he had by no manner of means reached dry land. No, he was still under water. He had dropped into a cup-like cluster of leaves at the tip of a long stem. A colorful water-garden was spread below. The sunlight rippled up and down the pebble-strewn paths that led around the flower beds. About him were tall stems, swaying in the currents that, under water, took the place of gentle breezes. There were thick bushy shrubs, like a squirrel's tail, and shrubs with spiky leaves, and delicate blades of pale-green pond-grass growing close to the ground.

All around the garden were overhanging cliffs, from which the moss hung in curtains. Directly above was one of these cliffs. A cleft in the face near the top showed how he had come through. As there was no means of regaining this point from the stem, he proceeded to climb down, stepping gingerly from leaf to leaf. Fortunately these grew around the stem like steps in a spiral staircase. He encountered no difficulty, until he reached a point about six inches from the bottom, where the leaves stopped, leaving only the smooth green stem.

Now six inches is nothing to be concerned about when you are as large as you should be. To Tom, who could have eaten his dinner comfortably off the end of your thumb, it was like six feet. He glanced down, therefore, with misgiving. At length, twining his legs around the stem, he cautiously let himself down, hand under hand, until his feet touched something hard. Thereupon, imagining he had reached the ground,

he let himself drop. The next instance his feet slipped from under him, and he went sailing head-over-heels. At the same moment a long black eel, which had been sleeping under the stem, rose up.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I beg your par-



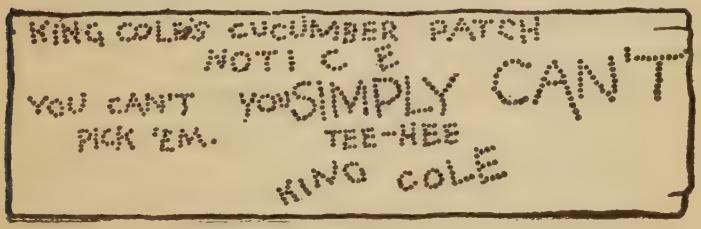
don," it cried in distress, as if it had done something terribly wrong in letting itself be stepped upon. "I'm a poor, miserable, but exceedingly slippery eel. Oh, please let me beg your pardon—just once!"

"Humph, you might have picked a better place to sleep in and not be in the way of persons coming down the trees," scolded Tom.

"I know I might have—but I didn't, you see—I didn't!" And it tried to wring its hands. Unfortunately it had no hands, so it couldn't manage it.

"Where am I?" asked Tom.

"In the royal cucumber patch," replied the eel, becoming a little cheerful. It motioned to Tom to follow it. Then it squirmed through a narrow lane between the shrubs and stopped before a sign on the side of the cliff, right near the ground. It was a strange sign. The letters kept moving around, which made the words difficult to read. On close view, Tom saw that they were formed by snails. He read as follows:



"King Cole," said Tom, half to himself, trying to remember where he had heard the

name. For he had heard it—yes, indeed, just as you have heard it. "King Cole—" he repeated.

"The merry old—" began the eel.

"Oh yes, now I know!" exclaimed Tom. And the words of the ditty ran through his head:

Old King Cole
Was a merry old soul
And a merry old soul was he.
He called for his pipe
And he called for his bowl
And he called for his fiddlers three.
And every fiddler he had a fine fiddle
And a very fine fiddle had he.
"Tweedle-dee, tweedle-dee," said the fiddlers.
Oh, there's none so rare.
As can compare
With King Cole and his fiddlers three!

"But where are the cucumbers?" Tom asked, glancing around. His eye lighted on a patch, arranged in neat little hills. The sunshine, coming down through the clear

water, sparkled over it. Of cucumbers, however, there were none.

"They're keeping cool. There's nothing like cucumbers for keeping cool," explained the eel. They crossed the patch and entered a grove composed of tall leafy plants. On a little bed of moss sat in the shade the cucumbers, looking very cool and comfortable in their deep-green outfits. They were covered with little prickles, as cucumbers usually are. They glanced up with a start at Tom's approach.

"I hope," said the eel politely, addressing the cucumbers, "we're not intruding." The cucumbers said nothing but raised themselves on their prickles and drew back. They were not at all like dry-land cucumbers, which don't stir even though they're sliced, and salted and peppered, and soused in vinegar and dill, and eaten.

"We don't mean any harm. We won't pick you," the eel assured them.

Tom, who was intent on doing bad, was

of another mind. "Why not pick them?" he said in a loud voice. "Cucumbers are meant to be picked, aren't they? We always pick our cucumbers."

"Oh, but you can't, you can't. You mustn't think of it. It's impossible. You—you can't!" And the poor eel, at a loss for words, went on saying over and over again: "You can't, you simply can't."

"Nonsense, of course I can!" Tom retorted, rushing at the cucumbers. "What's to stop me from picking them!"

Away went the cucumbers, scampering off on their prickles like hedgehogs. Around and around ran Tom. But catch them he could not. Finally choosing a short fat little cucumber he raced after it furiously, disregarding the others, who quickly disappeared in the thick water weeds on the other side of the patch.

The way led out through an opening in the cliffs and deep into a thick forest of reeds and cattails. Somewhere behind him he could hear the faint voice of the eel.

"You see, you can't . . . you can't pick them . . . not at all."

He turned around to see the eel rolling off like a wheel. All at once it struck a bump and went springing high up. Then it turned turtle.

To turn turtle, of course, is to turn upside-down. At least, it is with ordinary things like automobiles and railroad trains and moving-vans. The eel, however, not understanding the real meaning of turning turtle, actually *turned into a turtle.* You see how valuable it is to know what words mean exactly. A little mistake and—pouf! you are a turtle.

No sooner had the unfortunate eel turned into a possibly more unfortunate turtle than another surprising thing happened. Pussy darted out from behind a shrub. Catching up the turtle by the neck, like a goose, she carried it swiftly toward Tom.

His eyes opened like saucers when he beheld the change that had come over the cat. Her fur had changed into scales. Her tail had become short and rounded. Instead of

paws she had fins. All that remained of her former self was her whiskers. She was a catfish.

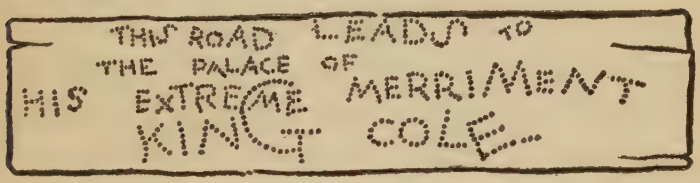
Now Tom had no desire to meet her. It was her fault that he had fallen into the well. He was not going to take her back to dry land again. Now that she was a fish, let her stay a fish. It served her right.

He noticed in a dull sort of way that the turtle bore a striking resemblance to a fiddle. But it passed right out of his head as he turned his back on both of them and, forgetting all about the cucumber, fled helter-skelter into the woods.

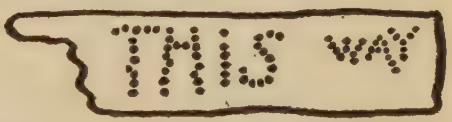
Chapter VIII

Showing What May Happen on a Road With Too Many Turnings

TOM ran through long lanes of underwater trees until at length he found himself on a path leading to a stone arch. Here he stopped to read another snail-sign. The sign read:



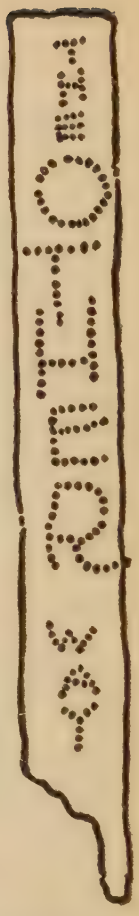
Directly under the arch the path divided in three. In the center was a sign-post with three arms. The first arm read (it was another snail-sign):



—the second read.

While the third arm read:

The three paths started off bravely enough in different directions, but after a few feet turned abruptly toward each other. Then they twined around each other, crisscrossing and zigzagging in the most ridiculous manner until they all disappeared behind a low hill.



While Tom was deliberating which to follow, for it was no easy task to decide, a crowd of fishes came twirling out from behind the hill. Round and round they went as if they were waltzing. There was a bloater, a kipper, a red herring, and two sardines. At the point where the paths joined they suddenly ran in together.

"Which path do I take?" cried Tom to them.

"Neither!" they exclaimed excitedly. "Don't take neither!" (They were so excited they forgot their grammar, you see.)

"Why not?"

Drawing closer, they whispered: "The fiddle is *stolen!*"

Tom sprang back, partly in amazement, partly because the last word, which was shouted, rang in his head like gunfire.

"Stolen!" repeated the kipper in an awed voice. "Deliberately stolen—and by whom!"

"By whom?" inquired Tom.

"By no one knows whom," it replied, much to his disappointment.

"And His Extremity the King doesn't know about it yet," one of the sardines put in.

"It will be awful when he does," said the other.

"Awful!" repeated the rest, rolling their eyes. *"Awful!"*

"That's why," the bloater confided, "we're chasing ourselves like this. The sooner we chase ourselves, the better. For he'd only put us out if we told it to him—"

Tom pricked up his ears. "Put you out? Put you out where?"

None of them would answer directly to this. Finally the red herring plucked up enough courage to say very faintly: "Out of the water."

"Oh!" said Tom. Then he said again, "Oh!" Finally he nodded his head several times in rapid succession and smiled agreeably. It was plain he was well pleased.

"And will anyone who tells him be put out?"

"Anyone."

"Even I?"

"Even you."

"Anyone who makes His Extremity cry," the kipper said, "is instantly put out. It is the rule."

"Humph," said Tom. Then, turning rapidly on his heel he dashed down the path marked THIS WAY.

"You'd better chase yourself," he heard the fishes say, as he started turning round and round in the maze of paths. He caught a glimpse of them chasing themselves off. All

at once instead of proceeding around the hill, he felt himself spinning back toward the archway. It was impossible to stop himself. The next moment he spun under the arch and went whirling away into the forest of reeds and cattails again.

Chapter IX

Tom Cures a Shark's Tummy-ache and Gets Paid for His Pains

WHEN Tom finally stopped spinning he was deep among the cattails. Scowling (for he was exceedingly discontented), he started off in search of the archway, picking his way as best he could through the narrow lanes formed by the reeds. He realized he had made a mistake in running down the tangled paths so rapidly. It was a great pity he had not succeeded in reaching the palace of His Extreme Merriment, King Cole, in time to break the news.

So someone had stolen the fiddle. Well, well, that was news! The poem would have to be changed then.

Old King Cole
Was a merry old soul
And a merry old soul was he.

He called for his pipe
And he called for his bowl
And he called for his fiddlers three.
And every fiddler he had a fine fiddle—

No, that line and the lines following would have to be changed.

But only two fiddlers they had fine fiddles
For the third was stolen, you see.
"Stolen from me! Stolen from me!" wailed
the third fiddler
Oh there's none so rare
As can compare—

All at once he stopped short. The cat had stolen it! Yes, he was certain of it. He remembered how she had made off with the eel that had just turned turtle. It was neither eel nor turtle. It was fiddle! He glanced around sharply, as if he expected to see the cat hiding behind one of the trees. He did see something moving behind a branch close by. To his surprise it turned out to be his old friend the bug.

"Oh, I thought you were the cat," he said, without trying to hide his disappointment.

"Hm-m, is school over already?"

"It was over long ago."

"And did everything turn out as badly as you hoped?"

Tom shook his head.

"That's a shame. But don't get discouraged. You can't expect to become bad all at once. It takes practice. Have you been practicing?"

"Yes, but it doesn't seem to do any good."

"Hm-m, you don't want it to do any good. The less good it does the better—I mean, the worse. Have you kicked the cat down a flight of stairs yet?"

"The cat," cried Tom, "stole—"

"She stole away. That's too bad. It's just like a cat to steal away when you need her most. Why don't you climb to the top of one of these reeds and fall off? That would be bad enough, especially if you could manage to break your neck."

"I shouldn't like that—no, not at all!"

"Hm-m, you mustn't expect to *like* being bad. It's most unpleasant. I thought you knew that. It's disagreeable enough for ordinary good-to-middlin' creatures, but for a *particularly* good—"

At that instant it was interrupted by a loud "Ouch, ouch, o-ou-ouch!" coming from a clump of reeds a short distance away. The bug looked up brightly.

"Can you cure a tummy-ache?" it asked.

"No."

"Excellent! Here's your opportunity to make someone miserable. Little Miss Shark has a tummy-ache. She needs a doctor. You can be the doctor."

"Can I give her medicine?" he demanded eagerly.

"Of course—as much as you please."

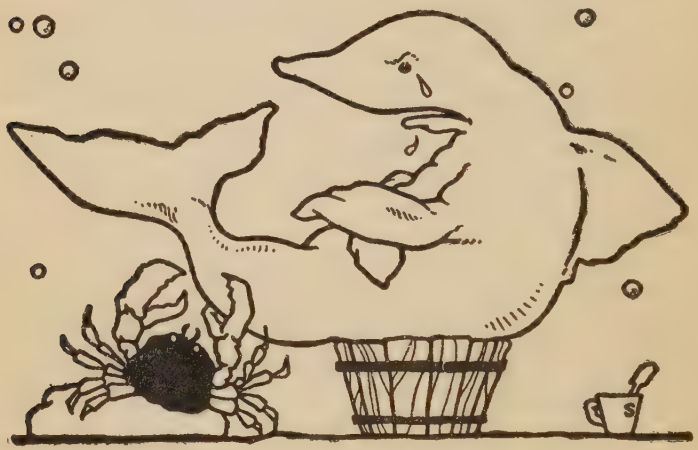
He waited for no more but hastened toward the clump of reeds.

"Ouch, o-ou-ouch!" groaned the shark.

"You can't help making her worse," the bug called after him encouragingly.

In a clearing he came upon Miss Shark,

lying in a wooden tub with her fins folded over her stomach and a most doleful expression on her face, which, even when it was serene, must have been frightening to gaze upon. He quickly regretted having come.



However, it was too late to turn back, so he put on a bold face and advanced with resolute step. Sitting on a rock alongside of the tub was a large crab with disagreeably long claws. It was pinching the unfortunate shark. The crab started up as he approached.

"Who are you?" it demanded.

"I'm the doctor. Who are you?"

"I'm the nurse. I'm glad to meet you, doctor." Scrambling off the rock it made a snatch for his hand. Its intentions were good. It meant only to shake it. Tom, however, impolitely drew it back. Meanwhile the shark set up a deafening clatter, beating her fins together and clashing her teeth in rage.

"I hate doctors, I hate doctors!"

"She doesn't like doctors much, does she?" Tom remarked, keeping a good distance away from the tub.

"Don't mind her, doctor. It's just a little temper. Come, dearie," it said, giving the shark a pinch on the tail, "say good morning to the doctor."

"O-ou-ouch! Don't pinch me, nursie. Please don't. Good morning, good morning," she cried, sitting up in the tub.

"Now, dearie," said the crab, "tell the doctor all about your pain."

"I've got a pain in the tummy."

Tom looked very solemn. "Does the pain hurt a great deal?"

"The pain doesn't hurt at all. It's my tummy that hurts."

"You mustn't contradict the doctor," said the crab severely. "He knows what hurts you."

"Certainly," agreed Tom. "I know everything. Your tummy hurts because you ate something that didn't agree with you."

"There, what did I tell you!" the crab exclaimed triumphantly. "Those were my very words, doctor. 'Miss,' I said, 'as sure as I'm sitting here your tummy hurts because you ate something that didn't agree with you.'"

"What did you eat?" Tom asked.

At this point the shark became very much upset again and tried to escape from the tub by wriggling out through a crack in the bottom. She was prevented by her nurse.

"Mustn't, mustn't!" said nursie, dealing out pinches. "Tell the doctor what you ate, like a nice little girl."

"Ouch! I'll tell him. I ate some buckles, doctor, some brass buckles, and three hats and a half a dozen shoes and—"

"Why, that's enough to make anybody sick!" Tom remarked. "You can't digest buckles and hats and shoes."

"Exactly, doctor. You take the words out of my mouth. 'Miss,' I said to her, 'you can't digest buckles and hats and shoes.' "

"They looked so good," wailed the shark, rolling her eyes dolefully. "They were all so nice and new."

"It wasn't altogether her fault," the crab confided to Tom in a sort of hoarse whisper, holding one claw over her mouth to keep

the shark from hearing. "The three men weren't so wise to go to sea in a leaky tub."

"What three men?"

"Don't you know?" Then turning to the shark, who had been listening slyly all the while, she said: "Come, dearie, tell the doctor all about the three men. Start from the beginning and go right to the end. And mind, don't leave out anything."

"Is it very long?" Tom wanted to know. "If it is I'd rather give the medicine first."

The shark gave such a violent shudder and shot him such a ferocious look at the mention of medicine that he wished he hadn't said it. Luckily the crab came to his rescue.

"It isn't very long at all," it remarked. "If anything it's too short."

At this the shark, leaning over the edge of the tub, tried to give her face an expression of innocence. This her crafty eyes, her singularly wide mouth, and above all her numerous pointed teeth didn't permit. However, she recited the following:

"Three wise men of Gotham went to sea in a
tub,
If the tub had been stronger,
My tale had been longer."

"Oho," said Tom, beginning to understand, "and where are the three wise men now?"

"That's just what *I* asked her," the crab put in. " 'Miss,' I asked, 'where are the three wise men now?' "

The shark hid her head in guilt. Nurse dealt her a prompt pinch. "You mustn't be so bashful, dearie. Tell the doctor where the three wise men are."

"They disappeared," cried the shark. "They fell into my mouth and disappeared. I don't know what happened to them."

"You ate them!" Tom said.

"Yes—my very words! 'Miss,' I said 'you ate—' "

Tom's glance fell on a huge medicine bottle leaning against one of the reeds. It was nearly full of a deep black liquid. On the

label he could make out a skull and crossbones. He seized it. It was almost as large as he was. He managed to drag it over toward the shark.

"You must take this whole bottle of medicine," he said.

"That's right, doctor," the crab agreed cheerfully, "Open your mouth, dearie."

But the sight of the black medicine sent the shark flapping around the tub. Her groans echoed through the wood until you would have thought there was a shark behind every tree.

"It tastes like poison!" she shrieked.

"Poison! It's delicious," the crab insisted. "I'm surprised at you. See, the doctor will take a swallow just to show you how good it tastes, won't you doctor?"

"I'd love to," said Tom, growing pale at the thought. "But," he added hastily, "there won't be enough left for her. She must take the whole bottle. It's just the thing for a tummy-ache."

"It isn't, it isn't!" the shark retorted. "The bottle doesn't mention a word about tummy-aches!"

He cast a questioning look at the crab. "What does she mean?"

"Nothing, doctor," it replied, giving the shark a sharp pinch for talking too much. "There are some directions on the bottle, but they don't mean anything."

Tom now observed that under the skull and crossbones were the words "Directions for Use." He turned the bottle over on its side, then got down on his hands and knees and read them aloud, glancing up now and then at the shark to make sure that she didn't reach over too near him. This is what he read:

If your neck is stiff and your toe is sore
And your thumb gets caught in the kitchen
door,
Just take a dose at half past two
And six and nine and midnight, too—
At least, that's what you *ought* to do.

Do you cross your eyes? Have you wobbly
knees?
Are you much too weak for a hearty sneeze?
If so, don't raise a hullaballoo,
But simply sip a drop or two—
At least, that's what you *ought* to do.

A little drop will heal a scratch
Another drop will oil the latch.
A bottleful, if carefully thrown,
Will most correctly set a bone.
So drink it up in milk and tea
And drink it down in one-two-three,
And then you'll gaily leap from bed
And somersault upon your head
And shout: "With all my ills I'm
through!"—
At least, that's what you *ought* to do.

"You see," the shark exclaimed, "it doesn't say a word about taking it for a tummy-ache. It's no good for a tummy-ache."

"How can you tell until you try it?" Tom retorted.

"My very words," said the crab.

With this Tom set the bottle on its bottom again and, giving a tug at the cork, pulled it out. No sooner had he done so than the crab waved its claws frantically and the shark uttered a joyous cry. For the medicine was rising out of the bottle like an immense black cloud.

"Oh, doctor," the crab wailed, "you should have given it to her bottle and all. You said she would have to take the whole bottle!" It gazed up at the medicine which was now floating away with the current. "All that good medicine gone for nothing. Come back to your bottle," it cried. And taking the neck of the bottle in one of its claws, it scampered off after it. "Give her a pill," it called back to Tom just before it vanished.

Tom turned to the shark to find her grinning from ear to ear. "I feel much better," she said, clacking her teeth.

"Oh no, you don't! You'll have to take a pill. Where are the pills?"

"I don't want a pill! I hate pills!"

Not finding any pills, he picked up a sharp stone as big as his head and covered it with a leaf. "Now open your mouth wide."

"It's full of edges and there's no sugar on it! Take it away!" she bellowed. Taking aim, he suddenly thrust it down her half-open mouth. The stone sent up a harsh, grating sound as it scraped down her throat, causing the shark to gulp with out-popping eyes. He viewed her agony with pleasure and glanced around hopefully, expecting his reward to come at once.

To his dismay, the shark chuckled. Her eyes glittered hungrily. "Thank you, dear doctor," she said, leering at him from the side of the tub. "How delightfully sharp that pill was. How it has sharpened my appetite."

One glimpse at her gaily-snapping jaws showed him how silly it would be to stay an instant longer. He turned to flee. With a deft movement of her fin she drew him into the tub.

"I'm so grateful to you, doctor—so very,

very grateful. I'm actually fond of you. And to think I should have disliked you at first. I should have been glad if you had gone then."

"So should I," Tom cried, trying to squirm loose. "Let me go now, let me go now!"

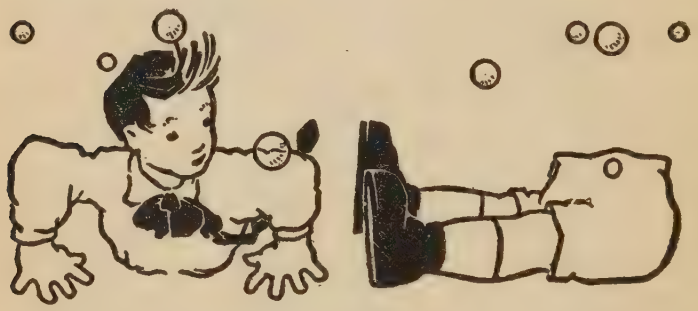
"But now I should be very sorry if you went—very, very sorry. In fact, I should hate it. What a good reflection you were to stay—what a *particularly* good reflection!"

"I'm not a reflection. I'm a boy."

If the shark's eyes glittered hungrily be-

fore, they gleamed a hundredfold more hungrily now. "A boy," she exclaimed, "a real boy!" She kept repeating the word as if she couldn't believe it. "You're a real boy?"

"A real boy," Tom insisted, very foolishly as it turned out, for at that very instant she



thrust him into her wide-open mouth. Then her jaws snapped together, slicing the miserable Tom in half!

Precisely in half! If Miss Shark had used a carving knife she couldn't have sliced him more neatly. He certainly had no cause for complaint on *that* score.

Poor Master Tom! Bad boy that he was, this was an even worse end than he deserved.

Do you really think so? Do as I tell you before you give him your pity.

Go to a shady pool. Take a pebble and drop it upon your reflection. Instantly it breaks into a thousand fragments, does it not? Each widening ripple carries off a piece of it until it is utterly shattered. Your reflection, alas, is no more.

Then, slowly the fragments begin to come together. Under your eyes they join themselves. At length, when the water has become smooth again, there in plain view is your reflection. It is just as complete as if nothing had ever happened to it.

Now as to Tom. Instead of sliding down the shark's gullet, the two halves of him slid between her jaws and dropped lightly to the ground, just out of her reach. Then the top half joined the bottom half and both halves —or more properly, Tom himself—fled like the wind.

It was some moments before the full meaning of what had happened sank in upon the

unhappy Miss Shark. Cheated of her dinner, she fell into a rage. Nor was this all. Finding her hunger increased, she suddenly threw herself upon the tub itself, which, not being very strong as you know, was unable to defend itself. Then as it had many fine joints (apart from those that were leaky), she soon devoured it to the last sliver.

Chapter X

The Story of the Clam that Wouldn't Shut Up

TOM gave less heed to where he was going than to the speed with which he went. He was extraordinarily pleased, therefore, on emerging from the wood to find himself in front of the stone archway again. He looked for the sign referring to—

HIS EXTREME MERRIMENT
KING COLE

but it was gone. The snails had wandered off. The same was true of the THIS WAY, THAT WAY, and THE OTHER WAY of the sign-post, which now pointed blankly to the three entangled paths.

Then he noticed a clam lying against the bottom of the post.

"Hello," he said, nudging it with the tip of his shoe, "which path do I take to the palace?"

The clam strained its little neck to get a good look at Tom (for it was a little-neck clam, you see), but not a word did it answer.

"Hello," he said again, nudging it with more force, "why don't you speak when you're spoken to?"

Silence.

Tom's patience was remarkable for its shortness. It mattered little to him that *he* rarely spoke when *he* was spoken to, and that others managed not to lose their patience with him. He delivered such a forceful nudge with the toe of his shoe that the wretched clam rolled over and over until it struck the archway. Hereupon its shell burst wide open.

His eyes sparkled when he beheld what he had done. It was a small bad deed, perhaps, but a pretty one. No one could deny that. He strolled over to the clam, who was

making a great many queer squeaking noises.

"Ah," it cried, finding its tongue at last, "now I can speak . . . speak! Thank you, kind sir, thank you, thank you. Oh, how long have I waited for this to happen! How many years!"

Tom frowned. "What's the matter?"

"The matter? I can speak; that's the matter. All my life I have been shut up and now I can speak. Isn't that matter enough?" And in its joy it danced a little jig on the end of its neck, a curious little jig that was lively and spirited and yet cool and clammy.

"And now," it exclaimed, when the dance was finished and it rested on its shell again, "and now, kind sir, I can tell you the story of my life."

"I don't want to hear it. I want to know the way to the palace."

"Just let me say one word—"

"First tell me whether I go this way, or that way, or the other way."

"Neither. But let me tell you the—"

"Neither?" interrupted Tom. "Why neither?"

"For two reasons. One is that none of them leads to the palace and the second is that you must stay to hear the story—"

"Where does this way lead?"

"To nowhere."

"And that way?"

"To nowhere."

"And the other way?"

"To nowhere."

"But the sign said they led to the palace," Tom insisted. "How is that?"

"They're *supposed* to, but they don't. It's all a joke. Everything here is a joke. I'm a joke and you're a joke—"

"I'm not a joke!"

"Oh yes, you are. You may not see the point right off, but you're one just the same."

"Anyway, I'm not a *good* joke."

"The story of my life," it broke in noisily, "is a good joke."

"Tell it to yourself, then."

"I have told it to myself, for years and years. Now I want to hear how it sounds aloud. I've been shut up, you know—"

"See here," Tom said impatiently, "if this

way and that way and the other way all lead nowhere, how *do* I get to the palace?"

"Just jump up and flap your arms, and you'll sail in through the front door. But don't go yet. You haven't heard—"

Tom, as you can guess, sprang off the ground and, upon flapping his arms, floated

off like a fish. It was a delightful means of moving, much pleasanter than walking. He continued along not far from the ground, cutting across the maze of paths. On reaching the hill, he rounded it nicely and found himself gliding above another water flower-garden. Here, arranged in squares and triangles and circles were pretty under-water flowers. There were water-anemones, cockles, sea-urchins and, along the borders, tiny starfish. At his approach the greater part of them rose and fled.

At the end of the garden, some little distance in front of him, was another hill, rather lower than the first but having several thin pinnacles of rock rising from its summit, much like church spires. He took this to be the royal palace.

As he was sailing toward it, he heard a voice calling from behind: "Stop! Just a moment, please!" He glanced around to see the clam swimming up to him. It moved by opening and shutting its shell.

"Just let me say one word—" it pleaded.

"Run off home," said Tom without stopping.

"Oh, sir, I can't run and I have no home. All I have is the story of my life and all I can do is tell it."

"Is it long?" he asked in desperation.

"It's twice as long."

"Twice as long as what?"

"Twice as long as anything . . ."

Just then Tom, who had been moving his arms faster and faster as he neared the hill, abruptly slid in through a wide opening in the rock and left the clam talking to itself.

Chapter XI

In Which Tom Meets Old King Cole and the Prime Minister with the Cold in the Head—A Riddle and a Rapid Rise—Tom's Joke and What It Really Meant

WITH a slight upward twist of his open hands, Tom brought himself lightly to his feet again. Then he walked into the grotto, scanning it sharply. The walls sloped up to form a high pointed ceiling. A clear

green light made walls, ceiling, and white pebbly bottom stand out boldly.

In the center stood a coral throne. In place of a king, a fish was sitting in it. It was a sole, a very pale, flat sole with a crown on its head. It quickly motioned him to draw near.

"How did *you* get in?"

"Through the opening."

"What, is the opening open? No wonder I feel a draft. I'll hold the Lord Chief Shutter responsible for this." It turned toward the back of the grotto and shouted: "Fetch in the Lord Chief Shutter!"

No one responded. The grotto seemed deserted.

"Where's King Cole?" Tom asked.

The fish broke into a giggle. It giggled so much that its crown slipped down around its neck, whereupon it began to gasp and sputter. Finally it succeeded in pushing it back upon its head again. It gazed smilingly at Tom.

"Very good," it said, "very, very good. I'll make you a Knight of the Grin. Fetch me my knighting sword!" it called to the back. "What's your name?" it asked Tom.

"What's *your* name?" snapped Tom.

"Excellent! Tit-for-tat! I like that. I'll make you a Knight of the Chuckle. All you have to do is chuckle. It's much louder than grinning."

"Just look here," said Tom, losing his patience with the fish, "you'd better tell me where to find King Cole. I have some very important news for him."

"Ah, important news. You'd better forget it—that is, unless it's funny. Is it funny?"

"No, it's sad."

At these words, the sole turned white, all except its gills, which turned blue. "It's forbidden," it said in a trembling voice, "absolutely forbidden to tell me anything sad. I'm liable . . . I'm liable . . . to cry. Think of that!" All at once it regained its spirits. "Tell me a joke instead."

A suspicion entered Tom's head at this moment. As everything that entered his head immediately found its way to his tongue, he said: "Are you King Cole?"

The sole winked. It was the merriest wink in the world. You wouldn't have believed a fish could have made it unless you had seen it. It was certainly old King Cole.

"But old King Cole was a person and not a fish!" Tom exclaimed. "Old King Cole was a merry old soul—"

"Exactly! And a merry old sole am I!"

"Soul!" insisted Tom.

"Sole!"

"S-o-u-l," he spelled.

"Wrong! *S-o-l-e!*"

"O-oh!"

"It's a pun invented by His Highness the Lord Punctuator. Fetch in His Lordship!" the sole shouted to nobody in particular. And nobody in particular paid any heed. "Where's everybody, I wonder?" Then reaching back of the throne for a bell, he

rang it furiously. By and by a periwinkle came sliding down the inside of one of the spires and, after peering about in a sleepy way, approached the throne.

"Ah, the Prime Minister! Where's everybody?"

The periwinkle sniffled. It had a bad cold in the head. "I dod't kdow, your Eggstrebity. They left without telli'g be adythi'g."

"Tee-hee-hee," laughed His Extremity. "You're talking much funnier this morning. Is it catching?"

"Is what catchi'g?"

"The cold in your head."

"It's very catchi'g."

"Then we can have a new game! Catching the cold! You can be *it*."

"I ab it."

"And you can be *it* next," he chuckled, addressing Tom.

"I won't be it. Why don't *you* be it?"

"There, what's the answer to that?" the sole asked Periwinkle.

But the poor periwinkle was too busy sniffling to reply.

"I know where everybody is," Tom broke in. "They're chasing themselves."

"You don't say!"

"I do say. And do you know why they're chasing themselves?"

"What's the answer to that?" the King demanded of the Prime Minister.

"Because [sniffle] because they have dobody else to chase, that's the adswer."

"That's the answer!" the King repeated triumphantly.

"Wrong! Just call for your fiddlers and you'll soon find out the real answer."

King Cole nodded agreeably. "Fetch the fiddlers," he said to the periwinkle.

"Ibpossible, your Eggstrebity. You have to call for the other thi'gs first."

"Quite so. Fetch me my pipe."

The periwinkle bowed to the ground. "Periwiggle obeys," it said. Then it hastened to the back of the grotto.

"Why can't you call for the fiddlers first?" Tom wanted to know.

"It's the poem's fault. The pipe and the bowl come before the fiddlers."

Here the periwinkle returned with a long, black creature which it handed to the King.

"Ah, my pipe!"

It turned out to be a pipe-fish. No sooner did the King take it than it began doubling up frantically, emitting sharp, piercing squeals.

"It's out of tune," said the King, blowing at the end of it. At this it squealed several notes higher. "That's more like it," he said. "Now it sounds like something. Something . . . yes . . . but what?"

"It souds like the Three Blide Bice," said Periwinkle.

"That's it, the Three Blind Mice! I knew it was something familiar." And he blew harder than ever on the pipe, which continued to fill the grotto with its piercing squeaks. Then Periwinkle, shaking its head from side to side, accompanied it thickly:

"Three blide bice,
Three blide bice,
See how they rud,
See how they rud;
They all rad after the farber's wife;
She cut off their tails with a carvi'g kdife;
Three blide bice."

"Did you like it?" the King asked Tom.

"No."

"It's not the way it's usually sung. It's a little flat. Or perhaps it's a little sharp. Which is it?" he inquired of Periwinkle.

"Deither. It's just id betweed."

"And don't forget this either: they haven't

been singing together for long. How long is it, Periwinkle?"

"Sevedty-seved years dext Bodday."

"You see, only seventy-seven years next Monday. No time at all. You couldn't do better yourself."

"I could."

The King didn't appear to hear this remark. "Fetch me my bowl," he said, letting the pipe-fish free. It squirmed off with great eagerness, disappearing in a cornice in the wall. The periwinkle, who had hurried off, returned carrying a glass bowl which it set down on the arm of the throne. Inside was a goldfish sitting on a white shell. As soon as the bowl was set down it swam up and sat on the outside edge, staring brazenly at the King. When he put out a fin to pat it on the head, it darted off and swam around the grotto, finally alighting on Tom's shoulder.

"Come back here, my treasure," coaxed the King. "Haven't I told you not to stand on strangers' shoulders?"

"Shut up!" retorted the goldfish in a sharp voice, like a parrot.

The King beamed with pleasure. "Isn't it a darling—a perfect darling! Who else could have thought of such a clever remark?"

Tom, however, had another opinion of the clever little goldfish, who at this moment snapped at his ear. "Shut up!" it cried. "Shut up, shut up!" Then it circled round and round his head. Being accustomed to clutching at goldfish, he sought to capture it. It dodged his fingers and darted back into its bowl, where it sat on its white shell, holding its sides with laughter. Enraged by this impudent fish, he overturned the bowl. But nothing disastrous happened. The bowl merely rolled into a corner and the goldfish, uttering a final "shut up," swam off into a dark corridor in the rear.

"And now," said the King, "I want my fiddlers."

"Suppose," Tom declared as the peri-

winkle left to fetch them, "suppose something were to make you cry. What would you do?"

His Merriment cast a worried look in the direction of the departing Prime Minister. "What's the answer to that?" he called. It was too late. The periwinkle was gone. He fidgeted on his throne.

"I'd have to do a . . . a dreadful thing," he replied at last.

"You mean put somebody out of the water?"

The King closed his eyes and shuddered. "Yes," he answered weakly.

"And if I was the one that caused you to cry, would you put me out?"

The King shuddered in agreement again. "I wish you wouldn't bring up such an unpleasant subject," he said. "It's anything but cheerful. Don't you know any jokes? I'm awfully fond of jokes—especially *good* jokes—"

He was interrupted by the arrival of the

first fiddler with its fiddle. The fiddler was a fiddler-crab, a fact which should not in the least surprise you. The fiddle was a turtle with a long neck, by means of which it was being carried. Both fiddler and fiddle ap-

peared decidedly ill at ease. The fiddler, especially, cast nervous glances toward the corridor in the rear, shifting away from it as far as possible.

"Sit down," said the King, making a vague motion toward the walls. As these afforded no suitable resting-place, the crab remained standing. Then the second fiddler entered, carrying a second fiddle.

"Sit down, sit down," the King kept saying, waving his fins grandly. Then the third fiddler dashed in with the periwinkle close behind. To Tom's satisfaction, the fiddle was missing. Both threw themselves upon their faces.

"It's gone!" wailed the fiddler.

"Godd!" echoed the Prime Minister.

"Stolen!"

"Godd and stol-ed!"

The King stared at them in dismay. "What is stolen?"

"The third fiddle," Tom broke in blithely. Upon hearing this the King's face puckered up and a mist passed across his eyes. His lips twitched. A sob started to form. In terror, the periwinkle, and the three fiddlers with their two fiddles scampered out of the grotto, leaving by the front way. Only Tom remained.

"Fiddle," groaned the woebegone king, "my fiddle . . . I want . . . my . . . fiddle . . . my fiddle . . ."

All at once the bloater, the kipper, the red

herring, and the two sardines came spinning in, driving Periwinkle and the three fiddlers before them. They stopped in front of the King, too frightened to budge. All were dreadfully pale around the gills.

"What does your Extremity want?" they asked.

The King gazed appealingly at his Prime Minister. "Tell them what I want."

Periwinkle pulled itself together. It tried to draw a deep breath. "The Ki'g wadts 'is 'iddle."

The effect on the company was astonishing. Terror changed instantly to relief. Smiles appeared. The two sardines hugged each other.

"The King wants his riddle!" they exclaimed, joining fins and dancing round and round.

"Hey-diddle-diddle
The King wants his riddle—"

"No," Tom broke in, "that's not right.

"Hey-diddle-diddle
The cat and the fiddle!"

which was perfectly right, in more ways than one. However, he wasn't heard above the din. At least, no one appeared to have heard him except the King, who couldn't be heard himself.

At length Bloater bowed deeply before the throne.

"I'll tell you the riddle."

"But I don't want to hear it," protested the King. "I hate riddles."

Bloater remained unmoved by these words. It bowed again. "It's an awfully hard riddle. No one has ever been able to guess it."

"I'm no good at riddles. I don't want a riddle!" He stuffed his fins in his ears.

"Go od, tell it to 'ib adyway," the Prime Minister urged. And the bloater recited as follows:

"My first is a ghost,
My second's a roast,

My third and my fourth are a little at most.
My fifth is a bean,
My sixth can't be seen,
My seventh is something that's just in-between.
Taken together I'm heavy as lead.
And yet I weigh less than the emptiest head.
I fly and I crawl, I swim and I float.
I play the best music and don't know a note.
I'm fierce as a lion and meek as a lamb—
If you manage to guess me, you'll know what I am."

All gazed hopefully toward the King. Instead of offering an answer, he uttered a wail of anguish and burst into tears. You may think it odd that anyone should care to burst into tears under water. It *was* odd. Instantly everyone drew away from Bloater, leaving the wretch standing alone, a helpless, miserable figure. How the King wept! The tears came streaming out of his eyes like thin lines

of pale smoke, curling off toward the distant ceiling. The water began to grow salty.

"If he doesn't stop we'll all be pickled," the red herring groaned.

Luckily the next moment he did stop, except for a few snivels. He glanced up. His eyes fell on the hapless bloater.

"Out with him!" he commanded. At this three pink salamanders emerged from the back of the grotto, dragging what seemed to be a large silvery balloon. Tom saw that it was an air-bubble, to which had been attached a strong cord made of twisted strands

of under-water leaf. It was all the salamanders could do to keep from being pulled off their feet.

Bloater emitted a piteous cry. It was too overwhelmed to think of escaping. It meekly permitted the salamanders to bind the cord around its waist, eying the air-bubble with dumb despair. It would have risen off on the spot had not the salamanders held it down. Then it was led, half-floating, to the dark corridor.

"Good-by, Bloater," murmured the others. It waved its fin feebly.

"Wait—What's the answer to the riddle?" Tom demanded. It was too late. The salamanders released their hold, and the air-bubble bore Bloater swiftly up and away, out of the water onto dry land. Poor Bloater.

The King cheered up almost immediately. So did the rest of the company for that matter. Bloater and the riddle were quickly forgotten. It was as though neither of them ever existed.

The salamanders had taken places on either side of the throne, two on one side and one on the other. They stood with chin and elbows stuck out, like butlers in pink livery.

Now Tom, who was curious to know where the air-bubbles were stored and equally curious to find the shaft in the corridor leading out of the water, started toward the back of the grotto. He had taken only three steps when the King, without addressing him, said in a loud voice: "I want to hear a joke. Somebody tell me a joke!" Tom stopped short as a chorus of groans rose up around him.

"What's the matter?" he asked the sardines, who happened to be nearest.

"It's our finish!" cried the first sardine.

"—our finish!" echoed the second.

"How is that? Don't you know any jokes?"

"Yes, but he knows them all, too."

"He can't stand jokes he's heard before."

"It makes him cry instantly."

"And you know what *that* means!"

Judging by the volume of groans that continued to go up, every creature in the grotto knew what *that* meant.

"Everywod here is dode for!" Periwinkle commented thickly.

Tom, however, showed no signs of distress. On the contrary he appeared quite pleased, if a little thoughtful. "Does he know *every* joke?" he inquired of the sardines.

They nodded. "He knows every joke anybody can possibly tell him."

"Does he know the one about the chicken—"

"—that crossed the road, you mean? Oh yes, indeed!"

"No one dares to tell him that one!" broke in the red herring. It gazed upward meaningfully.

"Then *I'll* tell it to him!" Tom exclaimed, striding resolutely in the direction of the throne.

His Extreme Merriment was still saying: "Tell me a joke, tell me a joke, somebody . . . tell me a joke."

"I'll tell you a joke."

The King chuckled. "Are you good at jokes?"

"Very good!"

"Practical or impractical?"

"Which is which?"

The King turned to the Prime Minister. "Which is which?"

So scared was the periwinkle that it could say nothing but, "I cad't rebebber . . . I cad't rebebber!"

"Oh, I know!" Tom broke in. "I've played both kinds. Why," he said, "once I threw the cat down the well!"

"A very practical joke!" said the King. "I'll make you the Duke of Tomfoolery!" A few half-hearted hurrahs from the company acclaimed this singular honor.

"And an impractical joke," Tom continued, glancing at the King, whose eyes had

begun to gleam strangely, "is like the one about the chicken that crossed—" At this the fishes started swimming frantically up and down in front of him.

"Not that one! Not that one!" they pleaded.

"Dot that wod!" Periwinkle said, scrambling through Tom's legs, almost toppling him over. Meanwhile the King added to the tumult by shouting: "The joke—tell me the joke!"

Between being pushed backwards and forwards, and having the fishes circling around his head, Tom became a trifle befuddled. So it is not at all surprising that he should have called out to the King:

"Why does the *road* cross the *chicken?*"

The King started. The strange gleam passed out of his eye. A good-natured expression—sometimes known as a grin—appeared on his face. "Oh!" said he.

"O-ho!" said the fishes, stopping stock-still. "You're a clever one, you are!" And

they slid back to their places, covering him with admiring glances.

"This needs explaining. Fetch the Lord Chief Explainer," the King said.

"B'Lord Chief Eggsplaider, this way!" shouted Periwinkle.

In danced a shrimp. It appeared to have whiskers, although they couldn't be made out, as its face was sort of mixed-up. It kept hopping around the throne.

"Explain the joke," said the King.

"What joke, your Extremity?" it asked between hops.

"Do I have to explain that to you! As Lord Chief Explainer you should know what to explain without any explanations."

"But he cad't eggsplaid without eggsplaidatiods, your Eggstrebity," the Prime Minister protested.

"You're only wasting time explaining," Tom broke in, "because the joke isn't why did the road cross the chicken but why did the chicken—"

"Wait—!" cried the fishes.

"—cross the road! *There!*" he concluded.

"We'll cross the road when we come to it," the King remarked.

"Please, your Extremity," the shrimp said. "I can't see the point. I think we ought to call in his Excellency the Point-Seer."

"Fetch his Excellency the Point-Seer," said the King.

"His Eggselledcy the Poidt-Seer!" Periwinkle called.

A long, lean fish entered, looking very perplexed and near-sighted. It was a smelt.

"Do you see the point," the King asked.

"I see hundreds of points," it replied. Its voice was long and thin, like itself.

"Ah, now we're getting at it. Do you see *the* point?"

"I think I'd better go back for my spectacles. I'd be able to see it much better. I can just make it out in the corner of the ceiling." Everybody peered at the ceiling.

"Oh, there it is!" the sardines exclaimed. It turned out to be the tip of the pipe-fish's nose, it having just stuck out its head to see what was going on below. Finding itself the object of so much attention, it hastily drew it in again.

"It looks like a nose," said the smelt.

Just then the pipe-fish, in turning around, stuck out the end of its tail.

"No," cried the others, "it looks like a tail!"

"A nose!"

"A tail!"

"It's the pipe-fish," put in Tom. But no one seemed to hear him.

The King began to grow worried. His lips trembled a little. He rubbed his eyes.

"Why does the . . . does the . . . road . . . cross the . . . the chicken?" he implored in a voice full of catches. It was a desperate moment. Fishes gazed at each other in dismay. Tom laughed aloud and winked at the salamanders, as if reminding them that they would soon be bringing in an air-bubble for him.

All at once the Lord Chief Explainer uttered a squeak of triumph. "I have it!"

The King lifted his head. "You have it?" he asked unbelievingly. "You *really* have it? You can explain why the road crosses the chicken?"

"Yes, your Extremity. The road crosses the chicken because, your Extremity, the chicken doesn't cross the road—"

The King tittered. Then he chuckled. Finally he burst into peals of laughter. The others took the hint. They roared likewise. Only Tom remained glum.

"And what about the nose?" he growled. "What about *that* point?"

The shrimp hopped up and down gleefully. "The road *nose* the chicken won't cross it. That's that point!"

"And what about the tail?"

"The *tail* has been told! And that's the other point!"

Louder and louder grew the laughter. More and more extreme waxed the merriment of his Extreme Merriment. The tears that stood on the brink of his eyes now sparkled forth as tears of joy. The kipper rolled on the floor. The red herring hugged itself. The two sardines hugged each other. The salamanders joined hands and danced round and round, while their tails cut graceful figures behind them. The smelt glanced at the shrimp, and the shrimp glanced at the smelt, and both went into raptures.

But you cannot imagine how vexed Tom was. He ground his teeth, stamped his feet, growled, scowled, muttered, bit his nails, and squeezed his face into such horrid grimaces that had he seen himself at that moment

he must surely have thought he was someone else.

At the precise moment when the laughter reached its height, Tom made a bold move. He dashed toward the back of the grotto. No one was paying any attention to him. He would grasp an air-bubble and escape up the shaft before they even remarked his absence.

With a nimble spring he leaped over the kipper, swerved around the sardines, sped past the salamanders, and finding a clear way before him raced like the wind. He reached the dark corridor and swept his hands over the walls. To his disappointment not the slightest trace either of air-bubble or passage to the surface could he find. At the spot where he thought the passage must be, he found two large rocks. In vain did he tug at them.

"Shut up!" said a sharp voice in the dark. "Shut up!" He couldn't make out the figure, but he recognized the voice as belonging to the nasty goldfish.

The laughter began to die down. A fourth salamander hurried up out of the darkness. It seemed to understand what he was seeking.

"Shut up for the day," it told him genially.

"Thanks to your joke there'll be no more put out until tomorrow."

"Shut up!" mocked the goldfish.

"Shut up yourself!" Tom snapped, as the salamander led him back into the grotto. All the creatures were crowding about the King, who had just had the misfortune to double up with mirth. The three salamand-

ers were hastily straightening him out again. On being set back in his throne, he caught sight of Tom.

"Ah, my good reflection—my *particularly—*"

"What do you want?"

"Come, sit next to me."

Tom was about to make an angry retort when the periwinkle whispered in his ear: "Dow you'll get your reward."

"What will it be?"

"Adythi'g you wish."

Brightening up suddenly, Tom placed himself next to the King.

"I do not know how to reward you—" his Extremity began warmly.

"The usual reward for baki'g your Eggstrebity berry," the Prime Minister broke in, "is to presedt a bedal—"

"A medal, a medal!" shouted the others. "Give him a medal!"

"Fetch the Lord Chief Meddler," the King commanded.

"But," the periwinkle went on before Tom

could say a word, "due to the eggstraordidary hubor of the 'oke, I thidk he should be giv-ed the hadd of the pridcess."

"Hoorah! Give him the hand of the princess! He deserves it!"

"Fetch the hand of the princess," cried the King. A salamander scampered off to do his bidding.

"I don't want the hand of the princess," Tom protested. "I want to be put out!" And he jumped up and down on the throne, a thing that a good little boy would most assuredly never think of doing.

"Is it springy enough?" asked the King eagerly.

"I want to be put out . . . to be put out," Tom kept repeating.

The King gazed around the grotto. "Where's the hand of the princess?" he asked after a while. Another salamander hurried out to look for the first. Presently they both returned, appearing greatly disturbed.

"Your Extremity," said the first, "the

first lady in waiting insists she never saw the hand of the princess."

"And the royal nursemaid," the second added, "says there never was a princess!"

The King frowned. "That's going to make it a little hard," he murmured. "How can I give anyone the hand of the princess when there is no princess?"

"I don't want it!" Tom contended.

"Ah—that settles it nicely. How accommodating you are, my dear! Come, choose your own reward. What is it your precious heart most desires?"

Tom sprang off the throne and stood in front of the King. "I want—" he said, glancing toward the back of the grotto.

"That reminds me," interrupted the King, "there was something *I* wanted. Now what was it? Was it my pipe? . . . No. Was it my bowl? . . . No. Was it my—"

"I want to be *put out!*"

"It was my fiddle I wanted! My fiddle, my fiddle! . . . I want my fiddle!"

Once more the grotto was thrown into

confusion. But only for a moment, for all at once Tom cried in a voice that rooted every creature to the ground:

"I stole the fiddle!"

He was amazed himself at the effect of his words. The fishes were speechless. The King leaned out of the throne. The grotto was stiller than a clock after it has stopped.

Then such an extraordinary thing happened that I am half afraid to tell it to you lest you do not believe it. Out from under the throne at this grave moment rose the fish-changed cat. Over the heads of the company, she sailed, then out through the opening at the front. Not a word, not a nod, not a sign did she give.

And the turtle-fiddle was between her fins!

The next instant the spell broke, then the King and all his subjects, of one accord, swept out after her, leaving Tom all alone.

Chapter XII

Tom Squeezes Himself into Good Fortune —A Frolicsome Goldfish—An Encounter with a Homeless Creature and the Bargain Tom Struck

AS Master Tom had but one idea in his head, namely, to return to dry land, he promptly betook himself to the dark corridor once more, hoping to find some means of dislodging the stones that stood in the way of the upleading passage. The stones were no lighter than before, and in a very few moments he gave up the attempt. He now took to peering and feeling under them, and to his delight discovered a narrow opening.

Making himself as small as possible, he succeeded in squirming through. He now found himself at the bottom of a long shaft, like the tube of a pea-shooter. At the very top was the surface of the water. He thought

he could make out above the water the arm of the rain-spout that stood over the old rain-tub in the garden.

So it was the old rain-tub. He laughed to think of the surprised expression that would come over his aunt's face when she beheld him rising out of it.

"What have you been doing in the rain-tub, Tom!"

"Telling a joke to old King Cole."

He wondered how it was possible to look up through the bottom of the tub until he remembered there was a hole there which he himself had made to help the water trickle away before his aunt could use it. A few inches always remained on the bottom, however. He could feel the warm drops trickling down at that very instant. He understood all at once why from time to time he found bugs and other small creatures floating about in it. He had thought they came down with the rain. Now he knew they went up with the bubbles.

Crouching as low as possible, he suddenly straightened out his legs and sprang, throwing his arms over his head. Up he shot, straight up. He could have shouted for joy. Indeed, he did utter the beginning of a shout when his joy turned suddenly to dismay. For instead of rising, he came slowly to a pause, then started to sink. There was a current in the shaft, caused by the trickling from the tub, which bore him down.

Words cannot express his chagrin. Why had he made that hole! Why did this bad deed come to bother him at precisely the moment when he least wanted to be reminded of it! He almost—yes, almost—wished he had been a good boy, a thoroughly good boy, a very model of a good boy.

But wishes did not help him. He continued going down. In a few moments his feet touched the bottom again. A second spring ended in the same way. Without an air-bubble nothing could be done. But where to find an air-bubble? Where?

Crawling back under the rock he spied a crevice in the wall opposite him. Without hesitating, he squeezed through and the next instant he uttered a cry of astonishment. He had squeezed himself into the most amazing good-fortune. He had reached the chamber of the air-bubbles!

There they were, in all sizes, caught in amongst the arches and pillars and overhanging ledges and deep rocky cupboards. Their sides glowed in the pale light. He ran from one to another in a fever of excitement. He touched them, pushed them, wound his arms around them, let them soar up to the ceiling. He looked into them and saw everything reflected but himself. It could not be otherwise since he was himself his own reflection.

He tried all sizes to see how large a bubble was needed to lift him up. At length he chose one about the size of his head. It was resting in the curve of an arch. He drew it toward him, holding it tightly in front of

him, like a watermelon. It made him exceedingly light. He took a step and quite unexpectedly rose off his feet. He considered what means to take to attach the bubble to

himself. He thought of drawing a handkerchief over the top and securing the four ends with shoe-laces. It was a good idea, but he had lost his handkerchief (as usual), and his shoe-laces were so hopelessly knotted that only scissors could have separated them from his shoes. In the end he had to content

himself with grasping it as tightly as he could, trusting to be able to cling to it until he reached the rain-tub. He dug his fingers into it as he sidled out through the crevice. The bubble flattened out like a lid in the narrow outlet but rounded itself back into shape again in the corridor. He knew he should have no trouble getting it under the rock.

There it was! Now to crawl under it and jump!

No . . . that wasn't the rock. It must be that one farther on!

That wasn't it either. It was that one then!

No.

Where could it be? The corridor suddenly took on an unfamiliar look. Maybe he had walked the wrong way? He retraced his steps. He would start from the air-bubble chamber again. But now he couldn't find it. The corridor seemed to have become many corridors, branching off in a dozen directions. He darted a short way down each, always returning because it was the wrong

one. He had to tread gingerly. There was constant danger of soaring off into the inky-black darkness above and not being able to get down again—not with the precious bubble, at any rate. Where should he go? Which turn should he take? He was ready to cry with vexation.

A brief flash of golden light at the end of one of the corridors started him down it full of new hope. It was a ray of sunshine coming from King Cole's grotto. From there to the rain-tub passage was a matter of seconds. He mended his pace, hardly taking notice that he was more off his feet than on them.

As he was running, holding the bubble clasped against him, a singular thing happened. The light all at once flashed back high over his head and went out like a candle, leaving him in utter blackness, such as exists under a heavy feather-quilt in the middle of the night. Then—

"Shut up!" screamed a voice.

He leaped with terror. There was no stop-

ping himself. Up, up, he shot. The golden light spun round and round under his feet. He recognized the hateful goldfish.

"Shut up . . . shut up!" it kept repeating in its sharp, grating voice. Then it broke into a mocking cackle that died away as it vanished among the rocks. It was not, I am afraid, the sort of goldfish you would want to keep in *your* parlor.

At any moment Tom expected the bubble, which he held at arm's length above his head, to strike against the rocks at the top. Now the gloom began thinning out gradually into a shadowy green. Little by little he was able to make out his surroundings: huge rocky icicles, deep vaults, shelves hanging with moss. He was in a sort of tunnel sloping sharply upwards. He could see the sunlight—it was real sunlight this time! —streaming in. . . . Then he sailed out into sparkling clear blue-green water. He didn't leave through the mouth of the tunnel but through a small space between the rocks

at the top. It seemed to him he saw a gate at the mouth, but he could not be sure.

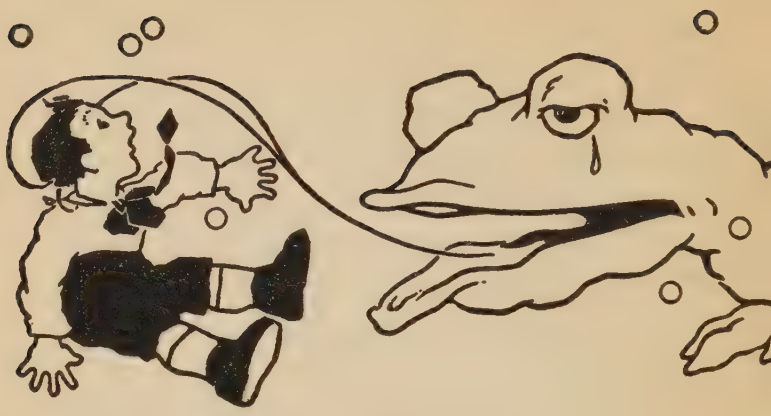
The water was distinctly salty. High over his head he caught a glimpse of long, rolling waves. And it was toward them that he was now rising swiftly and sur—

I was about to say *surely*. In the light of what happened at this instant you will agree it were better left unsaid.

A great, fierce-looking head with bulging eyes, over which the lids were half-drawn, lifted itself up on the end of a scaly neck. Then a forked tongue shot out and, twining itself around him, bore him swiftly down. The bubble slipped out of his hands. Away it went, doubly fast, glad to be free. At the very moment when it soared past the surface and burst into a breath of air, Tom was set gently on the bottom and found himself gazing into the face of a sea-serpent!

He sprang back. A sea-serpent is not a comforting sight.

"Please . . . please . . . come back!" it



pleaded. "I won't hurt you. Look . . . I haven't a tooth in my head!"

Tom, sheltered behind a coral, regarded the wide, down-curving mouth which it now held open. It spoke the truth. It had no teeth. Its nose was flat as blotting paper. Its tail rolled back in endless loops and twists, disappearing in the distance.

"I couldn't harm a baby . . . not even a baby!"

Tom stepped out boldly, half an inch.

"I haven't had a bite to eat in ten thousand years—"

"Ten thousand years!"

"It may be a day or two less. I've been getting a little careless the last few centuries. I'm famished . . . utterly famished. You can't imagine how hungry you can get in ten thousand years. I'm so thin I have to look at myself twice to be sure it's myself." A sob slid feebly up-hill and down-dale along its threadlike tail. On and on it went.

"So," said Tom, growing braver every moment, "you decided to eat me! Well, you're mistaken. I don't intend to be eaten."

"Dear, dear me! I meant nothing of the

sort. What nourishment is there in a reflection? It is like eating a shadow." Tom wisely refrained from revealing he was a boy, remembering the actions of a certain shark. "No," it continued, "I don't want to eat you. I just want you to do me a favor—"

"Favor!" he exclaimed, almost in a shout. "You want me to do you a favor after what you've done to me!" And he forgot himself so far as to shake his fist under its nose, a piece of bad manners most sea-serpents would misunderstand. This one, however, trembled.

"Don't strike me!" it begged. "I couldn't stand the blow. I'd fall to pieces. You don't

realize how weak I am." It shook its great shaggy head from side to side, mournfully. "Ah, how strong I used to be! With a flip of my tail I could send a ship flying to the moon. With two flips, I could send two ships flying to the moon. With three flips . . . and so on," it said wearily. "And now—now the most I can do is send a—a reflection flying to the moon—"

Tom's eyes spread open.

"A reflection!"

"Only a reflection. What a come-down. Just think of it."

"I am thinking of it," he said truthfully. "But why do you have to send it all the way to the moon? Can't you make it a little less?"

"Oh yes, indeed. Where would you like me to send it?"

"To my . . . to my aunt's garden."

"I don't know where that is exactly. Is it anywhere near the moon?"

"Why, it's right *under* the moon!"

"Then I can send it there with no trouble

at all. Just a little flip of my tail and—presto! it's there."

The sea-serpent seemed all at once a marvelously pleasant creature. He couldn't understand how he could ever have been vexed with it. It was so sad-looking with its bulging eyes and its endless, stringy tail. He rubbed it fondly on its blotter-flat nose and scratched the top of its head. A blissful expression stole over its face. It looked almost happy.

"And now," it begged, "won't you do me a little favor?"

"What is it?"

"I've been locked out of my home. If only you'd open the gate for me I'd be *so* thankful. I'd do anything you asked . . . anything."

He followed its gaze. There, at the mouth of the tunnel, he saw a gate, or more properly a fence formed of the masts of sunken ships. It was this he had glimpsed on his way out.

"I lived in there," it explained softly. "Oh, the happy days I spent in leaning on my gate, waiting for the mermaids to come and be devoured. My cupboard was always full of dainties: tender sardines, a tasty kipper, a rich red herring, a delicate shrimp, an eel, a clam, mock turtles, salamanders, and playful little crabs. Then there was a periwinkle for a cold snack, and a pipe-fish for after dinner, and a goldfish and a sole. My sole! What a royal dish he would have made. But I never got to him—never—"

"Why not?" Tom asked, exceedingly interested, as you can imagine.

"I was just about to tell you. One day I left to stretch myself on a meridian of longitude. Have you ever stretched yourself on a meridian of longitude? No? It is a pity. Some prefer Greenwich. As for myself I find it cluttered up with continents. But you must suit yourself. It couldn't have taken me more than a minute or two to grasp the North Pole firmly between my teeth. Then,

wrapping my tail around the South Pole, I gave myself a good stretch. This done I returned and knocked on the gate. I always kept the gate shut when I was out. Strangers had an unpleasant habit of dropping in and going through the cupboard. I had a trained catfish who would always come to the gate and open it for me when she heard my knock—"

"A catfish!"

"A bright little catfish. I wish you could have seen her. On this day I knocked, and no one responded. 'Let me in, let me in!' I called. By and by I heard a great deal of laughing. To my surprise it was all the creatures in my cupboard. 'Let me in!' I called again. 'Ha, ha,' they laughed, 'you are fooled this time, Master Sea-Serpent. Your catfish has left the water to become a cat, and now you will never get in to eat us.'

" 'I will not eat you,' I promised. 'Just let me in.'

" 'No, I am King now,' said the sole. 'You cannot come in.' And though I begged and

begged, they refused to open the gate. Finally, laughing at the top of their voices, they returned to their cupboard and left me outside.

"Try as I would I could not open the gate although you have only to touch the latch from the inside for it to spring open. How angry I was at the catfish for having left me in such a lurch. What right had she to turn into a cat? One of these days I shall find her again and then I shall have my revenge.

"For ten thousand years I have lain here, waiting to get in. And never a bite to eat in all that time. For who will come near when I am spread out like this, a warning to all for miles and miles? Occasionally a ship will pass overhead, but I do not scuttle it. Sailors are tough. Eating them is no pleasure. They are not mermaids. But you can open the gate for me. Crawl between the bars, touch the latch, and it is done. Then I can get to my cupboard again . . . to my well-stored cupboard—"

Its half-closed eyes suddenly opened.

"—to my periwinkle, my kipper, my bloater, my pink salamanders. And my sole . . . my . . . sole . . . who now calls himself a king."

Tom caught some of its excitement. "And the catfish, what will you do with the catfish?"

"Where is she?" it snorted.

"She's down there. I saw her myself."

"I'll gobble her up! I'll gobble her up!"

"And if I open the gate, will you flip a reflection into my aunt's garden for me?"

"Gladly . . . gladly. Set it on the end of my tail and I'll do it."

"All right, I'll open the gate for you. But you must wait until I come out again and set the reflection on the end of your tail." The sea-serpent solemnly promised. Then Tom slipped through the bars of the gate, finding himself once more in the mouth of the tunnel. He shrewdly put a safe distance between himself and the deep black pit. He found the latch readily enough. It was simply a splinter of stone stuck between two

holes. He knocked it out, and the gate, being of wood, instantly floated up and folded itself neatly against one side of the entrance.

The joy of the serpent on finding itself able once more, after so many weary,

hungry years, to enter its home, was touching. It cut a dozen curious capers. It tossed its head. It licked Tom's boots with its forked tongue. It sent loops and corkscrews and waves scampering down its endless tail. It was the most delightful monster it was ever anyone's fortune to meet.

"Now, don't move until I set the reflection upon the end of your tail. Remember, you promised," said Tom.

"I promise again. . . . I promise a thousand times! Only—"

"Only what?" he demanded alarmed.

"Only I hope it's not too big a reflection. I'm so weak, you know."

"It's no bigger than I am—not one bit! You'll have no trouble at all. When I give your tail a tug, flip!" He started off at a run. Then he halted abruptly and called back. "Where *is* the end of your tail anyway?"

"It's down a-ways. You can't miss it. You'll find it wound around the bottom of a coral."

He started off again. Then the serpent called.

"I say, are you *sure* you saw the catfish?"

"Sure!" he called back. "I helped her down myself."

"Thank you," it returned, "You're most *particularly* kind."

Chapter XIII

A Sea-Serpent's Tail and Where It Led to With Some Timely Reflections Upon Reflections

IMAGINE, if you can, a slender line winding in and out among rocks and corals and live sponges and tall branching seaweed. This was the sea-serpent's tail, whose tip Tom was seeking. Everything has an end, a sea-serpent's tail no less than the smallest worm. At every turn he fancied he saw it, only to discover it was still a bit beyond.

A water-meadow spread itself out on all sides in sparkling stretches of white sand. The corals were shaped like huge fans, or castles full of turrets and steeples and long slender columns. The sponges were plump, as sponges usually are under water. Their finger-ends fluttered. They were quite alive.

Schools of brightly colored little fishes hovered over them. His coming put them to flight. They regarded him anxiously from afar.

The sea-meadow led into a rocky valley. Boulders, with sharp beetling tops were

clustered in heaps over the ground. Slowly and with much pain he picked his way amongst them, clinging to the scraggy brown shrubs that grew on their sides.

The tail, which had grown thin as a thread, was becoming increasingly difficult to fol-

low. He climbed to the top of a heap of boulders and gazed around him.

There was the end at last!

He made out the coral. It was standing apart at the bottom of the valley. Hastily scrambling down, he set off again. All at once in this desolate spot he heard voices. He stopped short. They sounded close by. He listened carefully.

"Mot! . . . Mot! . . . Where are you? . . . Mot!"

He was struck with amazement. Mot was his reflection's name. Now that he was his own reflection, it was his own name, too. Who could be calling him here? Where were the voices coming from?

He stood tiptoe, craned his neck, peered under rocks. Then he spied a cave hard by. Was it from there the voices came? He cocked his head and listened again. Yes . . . he was sure of it. With that he ran toward it. The next instant he returned. How would he ever be able to find the tail again in this

wilderness? Here was a pretty problem. Having an exceptionally sharp mind for problems of this sort, he quickly found a solution. He would take the tail with him!

You may think this rather strange. Master Tom thought nothing of the kind. Picking up the tail, he twined it around his finger and walked off. Nothing could have been simpler.

Unfortunately the sea-serpent was not nearly as shrewd as he. It mistook the innocent movement for the signal.

Flip! Head over heels went Tom. Then away went the tail, as all tails do when that which they hang from takes itself off. And with them all went another well-laid plan.

Just then the voices (which surely *did* come from the cave) cried:

"Mot! . . . Come quickly! . . . You're wanted at the top of the well!"

"At the top of the well!" he exclaimed, scarcely believing his ears. "Who wants me at the top of the well?" He dashed pell-mell

into the cave without stopping to consider where his feet might take him. A short passageway opened into a low, round cavern, in which the water was dark and cool.

A glance told him no one was there. Yet the walls rang with voices. He scanned them closely. They were covered with what at first appeared to be pictures, each in a little frame. They were the faces of boys and girls. The mouths were moving. The voices came from them.

These faces were the reflections of all the boys and girls in the world. You must not think it odd that they were nothing but faces. Gaze into a well some day and see whether your own reflection has much more. Yet these faces did have bodies. They were all neatly tucked inside the frame. But so vague and ripply were they that you would scarcely have been able to make them out. Neither must you think it odd that the reflections of all the boys and girls in the whole world should be able to fit into a single cave. In

Tom's time there were not nearly so many children as there are today. No—not by several score, at least.

The ceiling was dotted with openings. These were passageways to all the watery places where reflections look up at their masters and mistresses. There were large ones and small ones and middle-sized ones, and some not much bigger than pin-holes. The large ones led to lakes and ponds and pools and wells and shady, slow-moving streams. The largest one of all led to the Old-Swimming-Hole. A constant stream of boy-reflections kept fluttering in and out of this hole. In response to some call which they alone heard, they would float out of their frames and slide up the opening like a wisp of smoke, returning a few moments later to the frames.

The middle-sized passageways led to the oceans and rivers, the small ones to the brooks and rivulets. As for the smallest, they led to all manner of odd places. One led to

the Rain-Puddle-Back-of-the-House, another to the Spring-in-the-Middle-of-the-Forest, a third to the Ditch-at-the-Side-of-the-Road, and others to the teacup, the glass-of-water, the soap-bubble, and the soup-plate. The very smallest opening of all was covered with tiny strands of moss, like cobweb. It led to the Dewdrop-on-the-Flower, and no one had gone through it in a long, long time.

"Who wants me at the top of the well?" Tom demanded, addressing the face of a girl reflection with straight black hair who happened to be in a frame nearest him.

"Your Master Tom wants you."

"Yes, your Master Tom wants you . . . quickly!" put in a number of other faces.

Tom could hardly contain himself.

"How do I get there?" he begged them. They motioned to one of the larger holes near the center of the ceiling. He felt a buzzing in the ears as though a faint, far-off voice were pleading: "Tom . . . come up

. . . change back again . . . hurry . . . hurry!" He recognized his own voice. Were his own thoughts buzzing in his ears? No —it was his reflection's voice.

"Jump!" said the faces on the wall.

Taking careful aim, he jumped. To his

delight he floated upwards like the others, straight for the proper opening. Just as he reached it, two other reflections came out, forcing him back to the bottom again.

"Too late, Mot, too late!" they said. There was something familiar about their voices, too. When they reached their frames and turned their faces to him, he saw why. They

were the reflections of Simple Simon and Jack Sprout!

"Too late," said Simon's reflection. "Your master is no longer at the well."

"His aunt took him away," added Jack's reflection.

"He was about to jump in."

"But he couldn't see his reflection, so he didn't."

"And now he's gone."

"Gone," echoed Tom, his delight suddenly changing to pain. "But it's not too late. I'll bring him back again!" With that he gave another spring. Alas, instead of sliding in through the opening, he struck his head violently against something that covered it.

"It's shut," said Simon's reflection, who was as wise as his master was simple. "You'd better return to your place."

The passageways were wisely arranged. When no one needed a reflection, they became tightly closed. This prevented the re-

flections from appearing at the surface of the water when their masters and mistresses were not present. All reflections weren't so *particularly* good as Tom. On the contrary, many were *particularly* bad, and lost no opportunity of doing what was wrong. Picture to yourself how cluttered up some of the

pleasantest pools would be with reflections who had no right to be there, if no means were taken to prevent them.

Set between the frames filled by the reflections of Simple Simon and Jack was an empty frame. This, Tom supposed, belonged to his own reflection. Deciding to wait there until the passageway should open again, he sprang lightly toward it. The frame, he now

found, was really a shallow box cut into the wall, affording plenty of space for his arms and his legs behind his face, which filled the front. It wasn't half as uncomfortable as it looked. In fact, there was something unusually agreeable in gazing down from a height on the wall, like a picture.

As he gazed at the faces around him, he recognized many.

"Isn't that Jack and Jill?" he asked Jack Sprout's reflection, pointing to a boy and girl on the opposite wall.

"Not Jack and Jill—"

"—but Kcaj and Llij. All names are backwards in the water," explained Simon's reflection, "like your name."

"Like all our names!" exclaimed a dozen reflections from all parts of the cavern.

"Mine is Htur!"

"Mine is Drawde!"

"Mine is Llen!"

"And mine," said a small voice, "is Wemolohtrab!"

Then they all started to sing:

"They call their children Jack and Jill
And May and James and Mab and Bill
And Rosalie
And Marjorie
And other names that end in 'ee-e-e'
But when we turn them all around
They've quite a different sort of sound.

"Oh, we are Llij and also Kcaj,
And little Llib and cute Semaj
And pretty Bam
And darling Yam
And Eilasor and Eirojram.

"But when they're Otto, Bob, and Lil
And Nan and Eve, instead of Bill,
Why, you can see
As well as we,
The matter's changed considerably.
For though we turn about each name
It always, *always* stays the same.

"Still we are Llij and also Kcaj
And little Llib and cute Semaj
And pretty Bam

And darling Yam
And Eilasor and Eirojram."

Hardly had they ended when Simon's reflection—or to give him his proper name, Nomis—shot off through one of the openings. "Where is he going?" Tom inquired of Kcaj.

"To the pail to see his foolish master, who is fishing for a whale. Every other minute he looks to see if he has caught one yet. Every time he looks, poor Nomis must be sure to be there to look back at him. And my own master is no wiser. He looks into the pail just as often. You will see if I don't have to go up a moment after Nomis returns. Sometimes they both look and then we must both rush up at the same time, knocking our heads together. It's a bother, I tell you. And every day it is the same thing. I wish I didn't have to do it."

"I'll be glad to go up in your place," said Tom, eagerly. "How do I get into the pail?"

"You can't help getting into it. Just keep going up all the time. You'll find the entrance through one of the loose joints." He stopped suddenly, as if listening to something. "My master is getting ready to look into the bucket. Get ready to spring as soon as Nomis returns."

He had hardly said this when Nomis returned. Tom sprang upwards.

"Oh, don't go—don't go—" Nomis called in alarm. "Simon is swinging the pail. You'll fall out . . . you'll fall out!"

"So much the better!" Tom cried, on reaching the opening.

It was difficult for him, small as he was, to force his way through. But having a light heart he thought less of the difficulty than of the long-delayed freedom awaiting him on the other side.

Chapter XIV

Tom Reaches the Waves—What the Wild Waves Were Saying—A Mysterious Door and What Was Behind It

INSTEAD of arriving inside of Simon's pail, he found himself in the first water-garden again. He saw he had just come through an opening between two cliffs, and that there were similar openings between other cliffs. It was neither bright nor dim, but dim-bright like a rainy afternoon.

In the center was a low, flat rock, resembling a table. But not a soul was sitting around it. He tried to spring to the top of the cliffs. His lightness was gone. He sank heavily to the ground. To climb them was impossible, since they were smooth as glass.

Not finding any chairs, he sat down upon the table to consider his next step. To return to the cavern of the reflections did not seem

wise. Moreover, he had forgotten which of the openings he had come through. The best plan, therefore—it was also the only plan—was to explore the various openings until he found one which gave promise of leading back to the well.

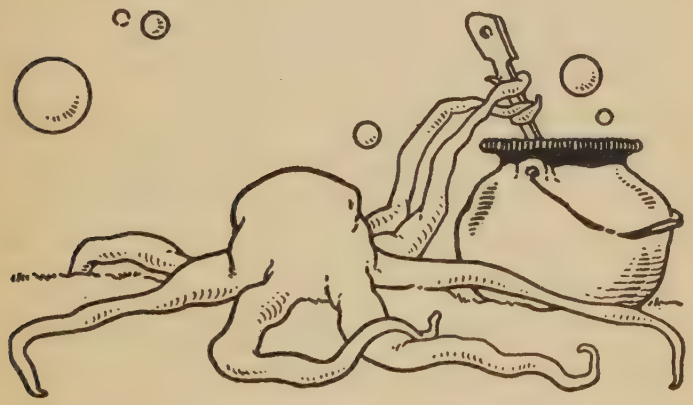
Which one should he try first? He was on the point of going through one when he heard the booming of waves. So close at hand did they sound, that he started. It was as though he were standing directly under them.

If you have ever listened to a sea-shell, you will know what he heard. He scanned the side of the cliff, and his eye fell on an opening in the rock near the ground. It was half lost in the shadows. He put his ear to it. Loud and strong came the booming sound. Inside, the sloping walls shone pink. The way led up.

Tom started up, his spirits rising with each step. The booming of the waves kept increasing until at length it became a deep-

throated roar. He expected to step out upon a beach.

He stepped, as a matter of fact, into a wide, high-ceilinged hall. It was a maze of activity. Directly in front of him was an enormous octopus. It was rolling a long wave to and fro like a long roll of dough. With one of its arms it sprinkled the length of it with yeast to make it rise, for it was still a flat wave.



Next to it was an octopus in the center of a smooth sheet of water. It was briskly

hammering ripple-rings into it. Another octopus was making long swells by shaking up a sheet of water, as if it were a rug. Against the wall was an octopus stirring the contents of a huge caldron. It was preparing a whirlpool.

A group of squid were whipping up water in deep shells. When it was whipped into a foam, it was taken to another part of the hall where several octopuses were curving a big wave. The foam was then spread over the top of it. Other squid formed white caps out of the foam, and tall crests.

This was the waterworks. Here were made all the waves, billows, swells, ripples, whirlpools, currents, and eddies with which the oceans are full to overflowing.

To our friend Tom the sight of the octopuses and the squid was not alarming in the least. After one has been bitten in half by a shark and grasped by a sea-serpent, one regards the presence of octopuses and squid pretty much as one does puppy-dogs. He proceeded with firm step to cross the hall,

for he saw against the farthest side a number of open doors.

There were eight doors seven of them open, the last, set somewhat apart, tightly shut. Behind the seven doors were wide passageways, spread out fanwise in seven directions, all leading upwards. As he turned to examine the mysterious door, a cold chill ran through him. A piece of water had dashed against him and was now sprawled out at his feet like a puddle. He quickly stepped aside, at which it picked itself up and began running around and around. It was a singularly active piece of water. It was, in fact, Running-Water. Up and down it swished, all a-sparkle. It circled around another piece of water, which was standing motionless in a corner. This was Still Water. Leaning against the wall was a very tall, thin piece of water—Long-Drink-of-Water, if you please. Off to one side were two other waters, seesawing on a reed as thin as the hand of a clock. Up-down, up-down. It was High Tide and Low Tide.

In a sort of enclosure near by, a crowd of waves dashed wildly back and forth. This is what they were saying:

"We're saying something every minute
Something deep, with meaning in it,
Quaint remarks as no, and yes,
And other things you'd never guess.

"For instance when we first arise
And still have wavy, half-shut eyes,
We say in our mysterious way:
'Good morning, looks like rain today.'

"And if you listen carefully
From one o'clock till half-past three,
You'll hear us say: 'Good afternoon,
Now must you . . . *really* . . . go so soon?'

"Oh, we are wild—we can't deny it,
But please don't judge us harshly by it,
For we can be as meek as hares,
Especially when we're saying prayers.

"Mysterious, murmuring waves are we
Who never understood can be,

Yet always saying what we're at—
Now what have *you* to say to that!"

Running Water swished back again. Tom hailed it.

"Where do these passageways lead to?"

"To the seven seas."

"And that last door?"

It winked slyly, then whispered—or more properly, gurgled: *"To dry land."*

That was all Tom needed. He sped to the door and flung it wide open.

All the creatures in the hall fled in terror.

There in the doorway stood a gigantic black tidal wave!

Chapter XV

Conclusion: In Which Tom Changes His Mind, the Cat Looks at a King and Simon Almost Catches a Whale

A TIDAL wave is not by nature gentle, kind or good. It is, in fact, as angry and disagreeable a body of water as you are likely ever to meet. If you should chance to come upon one standing in a doorway, do not remain an instant.

Do not, like Tom, wait for it to hurl you upon dry land. For it simply swooped down

upon him, clutched him in two of its immense black arms and hurled him deep into itself. It roared across the hall, devouring everything that stood in its way. Out shot a tongue, flicking up whirlpools, eddies, currents, wild waves, tides, and waters.

After being whirled and whirled about, Tom was tossed to its crest. Here he held on as best he could by clinging to the jagged points which kept sprouting up all around him. He heard the ding-dong of a bell with growing clearness as he neared the mouth of the tunnel below.

Plunging and rearing like a wild mountain torrent, it reached the narrow mouth, where it stopped short, flinging Tom through, back into the circular water-garden again.

He heard familiar voices and the ding-dong of a bell. Then he landed on a smooth pebble, and found himself sitting next to the low flat rock, which was just then being used as a dinner table. He was seated be-

tween King Cole and a monstrously big whale.

"You're just in time," the King said, setting down the bell which he had been ringing all the while.

"Just id tibe!" Periwinkle repeated, from the other side of the table.

They were all there—all the old friends. There was hardly place for them all. They were crowded together like sardines. The three fiddler-crabs were sitting on a ledge apart from the table, all holding their fiddles. The third fiddle with its large sad eyes

was unmistakably the eel who had turned turtle.

On the floor beside the King was a crocodile. Two salamanders stood by it, holding a large sponge. The next pebble-seat after the whale was occupied by the bug. It nodded genially to Tom, murmuring its constant *hm-m*. Then there were the frog and all the little Wells.

Beyond them was Shark and her crab-nurse. Shark looked surprisingly pleasant and was playfully coaxing some of the more bashful little fishes to dart in among her teeth.

In and out the many crevices in the surrounding cliffs scurried salamanders in pink livery, fetching delicacies to the table. There were jellies—or to be exact, jelly-fish of the most various choice: grape-blues, mulberry-purples, cherry-reds, strawberry-pinks, apple-browns, peach-goldens, and other flavors. Merely to look at them made the mouth water, a thing it did exceedingly well under

water anyway. Then there were great water-melons (which *do* belong under water!) and sea-cucumbers, and the very best butterfish, and heaps of freshly gathered water-cress. All these various articles of food, except the water-cress, kept dashing up and down, doing their utmost to avoid the hungry diners.

On the table beside the King was his pipe and his bowl. The pipe remained quietly coiled around a coral napkin-ring. The bowl, however, rocked up and down, thanks to the goldfish, who sat on the edge of it.

In the shadow of the ledge upon which the fiddlers were sitting, Tom made out a pair of blazing eyes fixed, so it seemed, upon the King. It turned out to be Pussy. Periwinkle noticed him gazing at her.

"A catfish bay look at a kigg, you kdow."

"That's so," the King agreed, making a thrust at a purple jelly-fish as it skipped over his plate. It disappeared, quite unexpectedly, down the whale's throat.

There were shell-plates, and coral knives,

forks, and spoons, and napkins made of sea-flax. The little fishes had tiny white bibs. The whale's napkin was as big as a tablecloth and was knotted behind its neck. Despite its huge size it had a surprisingly gentle face. Its little eyes beamed down warmly. It looked extremely pleased. Every now and then it would glance toward the surface, as if expecting something.

"Not yet," it announced each time, whereupon all the creatures at the table would glance upward with the same expectancy.

The more Tom thought about it, the surer he became that he was actually in Simon's pail. The circular walls, the crevices representing the loose joints, and the presence of the whale were all too much of a coincidence.

But why wasn't Simon fishing? Where was his line?

"Is this Simon's pail?" he asked the King. His Extremity turned to the Prime Minister.

"What's the answer to that?"

"He's asleep!" the weakfish and the mussel cried, giving him a shake from both sides.

"Asleep! My Prime Minister asleep! Why, that's enough . . . enough to make me . . . *cry!*"

And cry he would have, certainly, had not the crocodile burst into tears instead. The two salamanders hastily stuffed the sponge into its eyes, to stem the flow of enormous crocodile tears.

His Extremity chuckled merrily. "It does all my crying for me now. It's a great relief. My subjects gave it to me for my birthday."

"Sing him a lullaby!" Kipper called out, referring to Periwinkle.

"That should wake him up! A lullaby, boys, . . . and make it *loud!*" said the King, giving a sign to the fiddlers.

"Which one, your Extremity?"

Removing his crown, he rubbed the top of his head. He tried to think. At length he gave it up. "Where's the Lord Chief Rememberer?"

"Here!" replied a shrimp, springing up from behind a cucumber.

"Which one am I trying to remember?"

"Your Extremity is trying to remember, 'Sweet and Sour,' " it said promptly.

" 'Sweet and Sour'?" he repeated, rather doubtfully, as if he thought it might be something else. But he had no time to change his mind, for the fiddlers began sawing away on the backs of their fiddles with sharp-toothed coral fiddlesticks. At this the turtle-fiddles began to sing as follows:

"Sweet and sour, sweet and sour,
Fill up your sugar with tea-ee;
Sour, sour, try to devour

Everything sweet that you see-ee;
Soon, like the modest sunflower
You'll grow up in less than an hour
Till you're as big as can be-ee,
So eat my little one,
Eat my sweetest one,
EAT!"

Hardly had they concluded when Periwinkle protested loudly: "What was the sedse of siggi'g that so'g whed I wasd't ebed sleepi'g?"

But the King paid no attention to it. "Have something to eat," he invited Tom. "In fact, have everything to eat!"

"Have a watermelon," said the whale, helping himself to one.

The bug leaned over to him. "Hm-m, you've come at a very good time. You can show all your bad table manners now."

"I have no bad manners!" was Tom's surprising retort.

"Hm-m, no bad manners! How can you be a nuisance then? How can you—"

"I'm not going to be a nuisance!" Tom had changed his mind about being bad. What good had it done him? He had taken the bug's advice. Thus he had made his first mistake, for never before had he even so much as *listened* to advice.

The poor bug was lost in bewilderment. It uttered such a long *hm-mmm-mm* that some of the little fish grew frightened and hid under the table. Periwinkle now rose in its seat, and waved its fins jovially.

"Speech!" shouted the two sardines and the smelt.

"Speeches!" shouted the queer fish.

"Have some speeches and cream," the King said to Tom.

Periwinkle stood grinning all around him. It tried weakly to clear its stuffed head. "A-heb, a-heb!" it went. Then it gave it up and began its speech. It kept staring at Tom, as though the speech were expressly for him.

"We fide ourselves assebbled here on this bobedtous occasiod—" it began. Then it

came to a sudden pause. "We fide ourselves assebbled here—"

"We heard that part already!" broke in the clam.

"Shut up!" cried the goldfish.

Fortunately the periwinkle got a grip on itself and commenced again in a voice which, if not clear, was certainly loud.

"We fide ourselves assebbled here on this bost bobedtous occasiod . . . bobedtous . . . assebbled here . . ." It peered desperately around the table, then under its plate, then on top of Kipper's head. Finally it said, very faintly and sadly, "Id short, we fide ourselves assebbled here"—and sat down again.

The frog turned to the little Wells. "Say hurrah, children."

"Who-rar!" screeched the Wells.

"But why are you all here?" Tom inquired of the King.

"Ah—there's a question! Why are we all here?" he demanded of the whale. At this moment a weakfish and a mussel who were

sitting on the opposite side made a wild rush at each other, like two roosters, knocking the Prime Minister into a butterfish.

"I *did* do it!" the weakfish insisted.

"You didn't do it!" contested the other.

They both turned to the King. Mussel spoke first.

"Your Extremity, the weakfish claims he split a hair."

"I *did* split a hair."

"You didn't!"

"I did!"

They were on the point of making another

rush at each other, when a very queer fish, a creature with eyes like keyholes, who had been brooding over a cucumber, uttered a mournful cry. So sad was it, so full of melancholy, that all turned nervously to gaze at it. The fish half rose from its seat and pointing a wavering fin at the weakfish, cried:

"Did you split it after-a-while . . . or then and there?"

"T-then and t-t-there."

It sank back heavily, shaking its head. "If only you had heard my story . . . my story . . ." Then, without being asked, it began to tell

THE QUEER FISH STORY

"It was a little THEN and THERE
Were splitting of a hair.
Up spoke the THEN:
'Oh, tell me when
And tell me why and where!'

" 'I'll fetch a pen,' the THERE declared,
'And scribble you a letter—'

'Oh don't!' said THEN,
'It's ten past ten,
Pray think of something better.'

" 'I'm tired of being Then,' said THEN,
'I'm tired, too,' said THERE.
'It's plain to me
It's more than we
Can comfortably bear.'

"With that they raised their shiny ax,
Exchanged a fond caress,
Then with a sneeze
Chopped off their T's—
Which made them somewhat less.

"The little THEN was now a HEN;
She shed a bitter tear
And cried: 'Oh, where,
Oh, where is THERE?'
And THERE replied: 'I'm HERE.'

"The HEN was by a villain seized
Who would behead her when
She turned her back.
He gave a hack
And snipped her final N.

"Although the HERE could not be there
As it was HERE, you see,
It was its lot
To reach the spot
In time to lose its E.

"This made the HERE a simple HER,
As simple as could be,
And changed the HEN
From feminine
Into a simple HE.

" 'I'm not as I was THEN,' sighed HE,
'You're neither HERE nor THERE—'
She bowed her head,
'Let's wed,' she said,
'And *never* split a hair.' "

"Please s-stop," the weakfish begged. "It gives me the shivers. I can't s-stand to hear another word."

"It's the end," the queer fish said. "There isn't another word."

The crocodile, whose face had been getting longer and longer, was on the point of

bursting into tears, when the whale crossed its fin over its lips and said:

"Sh-h! I hear it coming!" Instantly there was silence. All the creatures peered upward—except Pussy, who continued to stare at the King.

"What is coming?" Tom asked.

"Sh-h, don't talk. You'll scare it!"

"Siledce! Dod't bake a soudd!"

The bug winked to Tom. "Now is the time to shout," it whispered. Tom shook his head. Yes, he did, he actually shook his head, while the bug, unable to make him out, stroked its chin in the puzzled way that bugs have.

Then from high, high up something started coming down. At first it looked like a point, then it became a line. Finally it turned out to be a fishing-line, with a worm at the end of it. It was Simple Simon's fishing-line. Down it came. Everyone, from the whale to the littlest fish, leaned forward as it came gently to rest on the shell-platter in the center of the table.

A cry of "Ah—!" went up. The whale tucked its napkin more tightly under its chin and grasped its knife and fork, holding them handle-end down on the table.

The worm made itself comfortable on its sinker. It bowed genially in all directions. It didn't seem to mind in the least that it was under water, surrounded by hungry fish.

"Who'll take the first bite?" it asked sweetly.

"I will," the whale announced, in a strong voice. It pushed its plate forward.

But Periwinkle jumped up. "You bustd't, that's dot good badders! His Eggstrebe Berribedt Ki'g Cole is edtitled to the first bit of the worb!"

"Who-rar!" the tadpole-wells screeched, thinking the Prime Minister was making another speech.

The King smiled. He regarded the juicy worm with twinkling eyes. He touched it with the tip of his fork.

"Are you fresh?" he inquired.

"Oh yes, sir. I was just dug up. I'm as fresh as can be."

"Where do you come from?"

"From the potato patch. I was brought up on mashed potatoes."

"Mashed potatoes? Are mashed potatoes good?" he asked Periwinkle.

"Are bashed potatoes good, your Eggstrebity! I'b astodished at you! They're *barvelous!* Especially whed sbothered id odiods!"

"In what?" Tom asked.

"Id odiods—dew Berbuda odiods."

"Hm-m, he means onions," the bug explained.

Now, all this was terribly discouraging to the poor whale, who grew sadder every moment. "You know . . . I'm the one who is being fished for," it blubbered. Being largely blubber, it could blubber extraordinarily well. "Simple Simon . . . is trying . . . to catch *me!* Everyone knows that!"

"That's right," Tom said. "Simon *is* trying to catch him."

But all the other creatures protested loudly. "No, no. King Cole must be first!"

"I'll just take a teeny-weeny nibble," the King promised.

"He'll just take a teedy-weedy dibble!" said Periwinkle.

The whale became happy again. So did all the others. The crocodile burst into such a fit of chuckles that the salamanders had to cram the sponge into its mouth to quiet it again.

"Hm-m," the bug said in a guarded voice, "why don't *you* take the first bite?" It gazed upward significantly. "*I* know. I've seen it happen before."

Tom looked thoughtful. The bug certainly seemed to be right this time. Those who bit on a worm attached to a hook generally succeeded in making a rapid rise.

A low squashy sound came from the direction of the fiddle-ledge. Mistress Pussy had hold of the turtle that was once an eel and was now a fiddle. She was tuning it up by tweaking the end of its nose.

"E-ee . . . aay . . . de-ee . . . gee-ee-e!" went the turtle. It kept staring straight at Tom. What large mournful beg-your-pardon eyes it had. As though to add to what the bug said, it began to sing about the worm, while the cat scraped the fiddle-stick across its back.

"Tweet-tweet
It's not to eat!
No, *not* to eat!
Tweet-tweet.

"Yo-ho,
Up you'll go!
High up you'll go!
Yo-ho.

"Fiddle-de-dee,
Listen to me!
Do listen to me!
Fiddle-de-dee."

All at once a curious thing happened. The King, who had paid no attention to the song,

rose in his seat, leaned toward the worm, opened his mouth and was about to take his nibble, when the catfish, suddenly dropping the turtle, darted forward like a streak. Brushing the King aside she swallowed the

worm. The next instant she dangled from the end of the line, which now started to jerk up and down.

As a *particularly* bad boy, Tom naturally would have been delighted to see the catfish's plight. To have taken her off the hook was the last thing he would have thought of. But as a *particularly* good reflection, which he

had really become, it was the very *first* thing he thought of. Springing upon the table, he grasped the line in one hand and with the other strove to free her.

"Hm-m, you're doing a good deed, you know," the bug exclaimed, in hopeless bewilderment.

Tom kept right on. "Hold still . . . nice Pussy . . . I'll have you off in a moment." He soothed the squirming, wriggling catfish. With a deft twist, he released her at last. He held her around the waist, stroking her gently. She was too frightened to move.

"Poor Pussy . . . poor, poor Pussy."

"Hm-m, pity for animals! That will never, never do!"

"Well, Pussy, since there is no way out of here we might just as well try to be happy about it."

This was the last straw for the bug. "Hmmm-m, you never will get out of here now . . . never, *never!*"

Precisely at that moment, with a roar of

thunder, one of the cliffs swung open like a door, and in surged the tidal wave.

If it was tremendous before, it was doubly so now. Its great shaggy crest stretched across the width of the cliffs. And riding atop of it was the sea-serpent. Its eyes glittered as it beheld the well-fed contents of its cupboard, sitting so still, so wide-eyed, so open-mouthed around the table.

It gave a grateful nod to Tom. So did the tidal wave, for it was grateful to him, too. Hadn't he released it from its den? In its tidal joyousness it swarmed across the table, tossing everything before it like a bull.

Up went Tom and Pussy. Both of them became entangled in the line. As he rose he caught a glimpse of the sea-serpent contentedly swallowing his old friends as they fell into its wide-open jaws.

And now the line began to be pulled up in good earnest. He could feel the tug, tug from above. The circular cliffs grew closer and closer together until at length he recognized

them as the sides of the well. He could make out the opening at the top, and two hands drawing in the line. His heart leaped with gladness.

"Out at last! Out at last!" he cried.

"Hm-m," drawled a voice just above him, "I guess you're right this time. But I can't understand it—"

He hadn't noticed the bug clinging to the line just above him.

"Doing a *particularly* good deed can't put out a *particularly* good reflection," it remarked earnestly.

"But I'm not a reflection, don't you understand?"

"Hm-m, what are you then?"

"A boy!"

It scanned him from head to foot. All at once a scared look came over its face, and it tried to dash away. He caught it and held it up between two fingers.

"Hm-m, you *are* a boy!" it cried. "Let me go, let me go!"

"Tell me why you always say *hm-m.*"

"Because . . . hm-m, because I'm a humbug, that's why. Now let me go!"

"Oh, a hum-bug," he repeated. He wondered whether he ought to let go of such a curiosity. No—he would keep it for a souvenir. With that he thrust it into his pocket.

Pussy was getting to look less and less like a fish and more and more like a cat, a very frightened, squirming cat, who had got herself hopelessly entangled in the line. They were drawing very near the surface now. He could see clearly it was Jack Sprout who was pulling them out.

"There she is!" he heard him say excitedly to Simon. "Oh . . . if only she stays on . . . if only—"

"Stay on there!" Simon shouted down—to the cat, for he didn't seem to notice Tom.

"It's *me,* Simon . . . *me!*" Tom called. It was no use. Simon didn't hear. Tom managed to disentangle himself from the line, holding on tightly with both hands as they

broke through the surface. Pussy was held quite securely by the knots. He was in the air once more. Rapidly he rose through the upper shaft of the well. The next instant he reached the top. Letting go of the line, he

leaped down to safety. As if by agreement, his reflection at this instant sprang nimbly from the window of his aunt's house, and spurted toward him like the wind. As he leaped down from the well, it leaped in. In doing so, it passed completely *through* him, returning him his weight and taking back

its shadowy lightness. Then it struck the water without a sound, without a splash.

Both Jack and Simon were far too concerned with the cat, whom they were at that moment hauling out, to notice what had happened. They merely observed Tom standing next to the well. And there was nothing singular in that.

Out came Pussy, dripping wet. Her ribs showed through her clinging, matted fur. Jack released her from the line. In one frightened leap she darted into the barn and out of sight.

Simon jumped upon his pail and began ringing his bell. Tom saw that one of the boards in the pail was missing, leaving a wide open space. He remembered the entrance of the tidal wave.

"Pussy's out! Pussy's out!" shouted Simon, ringing gaily.

Tom's aunt appeared at the window.

"Who pulled her out?"

"Little Jack Sprout! But," he added, "he did it with my line!" Then, setting down the

bell, he peered narrowly at the end of the line, noting the absence of the hook, the sinker, and the worm.

"Gone!" he sighed. "And I wanted them for the whale. . . ."

"The whale got them," Tom announced simply.

Simon stared at him, wonder-struck.

"Here, I'll prove it!" Tom said, fetching the bug out of his pocket. "Wasn't it the whale?" he asked it. It looked very small now as it kicked its legs feebly. From it came a faint, far-off *hm-m*. There was no use trying to make it say anything more. He let it drop back into the well, where it thankfully scurried off to the bottom.

"It's a hum-bug," he said to Simon.

"So are you," said Simon, shouldering his fishing-rod and marching off. Jack hastened after him with the line and the broken pail.

"Tommy . . . Tommy!" cried his aunt from the window. "What are you doing out of the house? Didn't you just this moment promise to fiddle me a tune?"

Instead of returning, he leaned over the well and gazed at the dark, cool water. There was his reflection gazing back at him, with just a trace of sadness in its eyes.

"Tommy . . . !" she cried again. "Do you want to *fall* into the well?" And running out of the house, she gathered him up in her arms and carried him back, despite his protests.

For though he had been a *particularly* good reflection, he was not yet a *particularly* good boy.

The End